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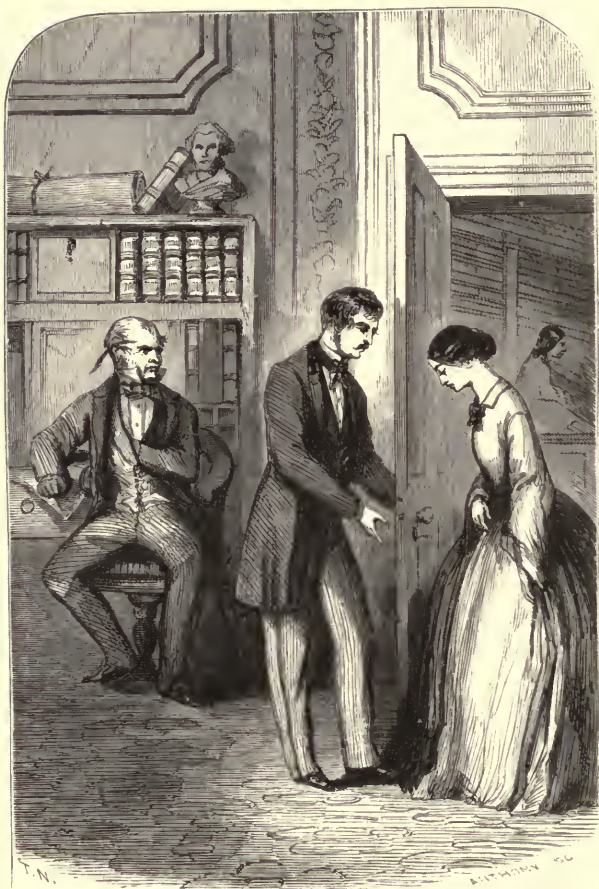












“He even held out his hand to re-assure her.”—p. 34.

LOSS AND GAIN,
OR,
MARGARET'S HOME.



BY
ALICE B. HAVEN.

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON & COMPANY, 346 & 348 BROADWAY.
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B. H. Bartlett.

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LOSS AND GAIN;

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MARGARET'S HOME.

CHAPTER I.

Have I not been nigh a mother
To thy sweetness? Tell me, dear,
Have we not loved one another
Tenderly from year to year,
Since our dying mother, mild,
Said, with accents undefiled,
"Child, be mother to this child"?

MRS. BROWNING.

"OH, it is cold, and so dark, sister! I don't think it *can* be five o'clock."

"But it is, Susie. I heard it strike just before father called us."

"Just one more little nap," urged the child, sleepily. "My side ached so when I first came to bed! It seems as if I had just got warm and comfortable."

The elder sister felt the force of the appeal, as well as the silent pleading of the thin arms wound tightly around her neck, and the face nestled more closely to her own. It required effort, even for her, to rise in the cold and darkness of the wintry morning, and to bring her mind to the routine of the day's employments. Susie was never well, and had turned so restlessly the first of the night, that she knew she must be suffering more than usual.

"Margaret!" called a voice again from the foot of the stairs, and this time impatiently. "Margaret! Susie! come, come; what are you about up there, both of you? Your mother's had a bad night, and wants Susie to take the baby."

It seemed as if "bad nights" were much the fashion in Mr. Grant's household. His wife was always complaining that the baby had kept her awake, and she "must have her morning nap, or she shouldn't be fit for a thing all day." Mr. Grant never made his final appearance until an hour that would have been inexcusable in a poor man, but for midnight vigils that kept the curiosity of the whole neighborhood alive.

Margaret, the eldest daughter, who shared the

little upper chamber with her sister, would willingly have borne the morning drudgery, but that she had separate tasks of her own. As it was, she nerved herself to meet the cold air of the room, and passed her hand tenderly over the sharp outline of the face she could not see for the darkness, rousing the little sleeper with a kiss.

“I can't give you another minute, Susie. It is very late, I'm afraid. Father has called us twice. You won't mind, after you are once out of bed; and I will have the fire lighted by the time you come down.”

“Oh, sister, I *do* wish we were rich!” the child said, wearily turning again, and clasping the pillow Margaret had deserted. “I wouldn't get up for two whole weeks.”

“And what would you do?” said Margaret, cheerfully, groping about for her clothes, and talking that she might rouse Susie more effectually.

“I'd have a fire in my room all night; wouldn't you, dear? and you should stay at home with me; and we'd live all by ourselves; wouldn't we, Maggie?”

“What a selfish little thing!” Margaret's voice was still playful, though she fairly trembled

with the cold ; and her hands were stiff and benumbed as she arranged her abundant hair. "There ! I'm almost through ; and you haven't stirred. Come ! here's your dress and apron ; and I put your stockings under the pillow, last night, to keep them from freezing. Let's see if you won't be ready first, after all ! Tell me some more of your famous plans, if we were rich."

"You should be a lady," said Susie, starting up at last, but more with eager thought than strength of will—"a real lady, and ride in a carriage, and never have to go poking off to that store, and get wet through and through in rainy weather, and come home tired to death. You should have every thing ; you're so good ! I don't want much, you know, only to be warm, and rested, and have plenty of books, and no children to tend."

Poor Susie ! The last was the great trouble of her young life. There was always a baby in the family ; and Mrs. Grant's babies were invariably cross. They were neither sweet, nor sprightly, nor affectionate—not that it was any fault of theirs, poor, neglected little things ! They throve bodily, nevertheless, and were heavy and lumpish, with

hanging cheeks and projecting eyes, a great weight for any one to lift, and a perpetual strain upon Susie, to whom the chief care fell. She was Mr. Grant's child by a former marriage, Margaret's own sister, and as different as possible from the present juveniles of the family. Her figure was slender, and bent into a settled stoop by this continual child-nursing. Her face, though delicate, wanted the roundness and coloring of health to make it attractive; while her large gray eyes, "neither joyous nor sorry," had a dreamy, unchildlike expression. It was no wonder that, with the habit of reverie, so unnatural to a shy, gentle disposition, made quiet by pain and weakness, Mrs. Grant and her familiar friends should consider Susie a stupid little thing—"obstinate and sulky into the bargain," Mrs. Grant would say to them. "But *that* was Margaret's fault. Margaret was always putting her up to notions, and interfering, if she tried to make her mind."

It was true that Margaret was the only one that ever took Susie's part in the systematic household oppression, of which she was the subject; but, to the child, she was always soothing and self-restrained. She listened every night with

motherly love and patience, to the trials and grievances of the day; and, though they wrung her heart and chafed her spirit, she was ready to excuse Mrs. Grant to the child. "I wouldn't mind, if I were you. She doesn't mean to be cross, I don't believe. We won't say any thing about it this time; father worries so. It will all come right one of these days." Yet Margaret could not see how, any better than her weary little sister. So far, every thing had "come wrong" since Mrs. Grant's introduction to the family. She had never ceased wondering how her father could have married a person so unlike her own mother, who had supplied energy to his wavering but kindly disposition, and, by cheerful, industrious ways, always managed to keep their home in peace and comfort. She had seen heavy trials before her death—first of all, the failure of her husband's numerous projects, a gradual settling down in society, as he became more and more a schemer; while those with whom she had commenced life rose above even the remembrance of their early intimacy. Then came the loss of two children younger than Margaret, both boys, who seemed to promise in the future the stay and dependence she had

not found in their father. Settled ill health followed, in addition to the slow inroads of poverty and care, before the birth of little Susie, a wailing, feeble child.

When Margaret's mother came to end the hard struggle with adversity, and laid down to die—knowing that it must still be borne by her children—many wondered at her composure, and the cheerful loving-heartedness for all others in sorrow and affliction; which was shown in word and deed. She had her secret struggles with a mother's natural affection and solicitude. Many a wrestling prayer went up in the still midnight for faith and trust for *them*. For herself, she did not doubt the wisdom and goodness which were hidden in the losses and disappointments that had subdued the pride and ambition of her character, to the humble meekness of a Christian, and taught her to look forward with a longing to the "rest" which is thus won. But, for them! oh, how her mother's heart yearned unutterably to bear the sickly little baby with her, away from all pain, and wailing, and to secure her fair bright Margaret from the trials which she had endured!

It is so much harder to be resigned to the

needful chastening of those we love, than to bear the heavy stripes ourselves. In the blindness of earthly affection, we would remove them from the stroke, though acknowledging that for ourselves, in very mercy he hath corrected us.

The prayers were heard, and the angel of His presence came with the consolation of a trust far greater than human foresight, to that lonely death bed; that revealed the blessing of the lingering illness; time to teach and to illustrate by patience in suffering the lessons of her own life, to the daughter on whom her burden was to be laid.

Already matured by sharing her mother's anxieties, Margaret saw the last look turned from her father's face to the sleeping baby sister, and then resting on herself, with a mute, wistful pleading. She comprehended its fullest meaning. She was to watch over, and care for them, to supply as far as possible her mother's vacant place. She had tried to do this, in her ignorance and inexperience, looking for help, as she had been taught, to a Counsellor that could also aid. Her father called her his "comforter," the child repaid her love with clinging fondness. But this was not her life-trial. Another came to them in her dead

mother's stead, a selfish, characterless, aimless woman, whose influence upon her father was the reverse of all that the first Mrs. Grant had been ; and he became more and more a dreamer, with a spirit broken, and a temper made irritable by repeated failures, and the taunts that were sure to follow. Her present occupation relieved Margaret in a measure from the irksomeness of home, but Susie's bondage was a constant, daily trial. Rebelling in heart at the change, she still prayed, and tried to hope that all would be well in the end even for her motherless little charge. But it needed constant watchfulness over herself, and now that winter had come again, with no cessation of Susie's toil, and hardships, the temptation to murmur and despond was ever present. This cheerless day dawn, especially weighed upon her spirits ; but her face lightened, as she heard the slow, unwilling footsteps of the child, creeping down the stairs. She had been moving about quickly, and a fire already began to speak for itself with a little snap, and crackle, which did its best to sound like household music.

“There,” said Margaret, as Susie couched down, and held her benumbed hands close to the

very bars of the grate ; “ you see I always do as I say, and here’s the fire I promised you ; take care, the stove will heat faster than you think. Now here’s the teakettle, and the baby has gone to sleep again I guess, for I haven’t heard a sound since I came down stairs.”

“ But my side aches as bad as it did last night, and it hurts me so to lift off the kettle, and the children are always so cross, and won’t stand still when I try to wash their faces. Oh, dear, what shall I do, sister ? ”

“ Give up trying, and lie down and die ! ” rose to Margaret’s lips, bitterly ; for she knew it was all so, and saw no brighter future before them. But it was not the first time she had checked promptings like these, and no one would have guessed they had arisen from the tone of her reply.

“ Do ? Why, as well as you can, Susie. No one can do more than that. I’ll rub your side again, to-night. That always rests you, you know ; and perhaps I’ll be home in time to finish that story after you are snug and warm in bed. I’ll keep it in mind to comfort me, too, when I get tired and cross waiting on people.”

“ I don’t think you know how to get cross.”

And the child brightened with the love that prompted this firm belief. "Ruth says you don't; and she says you get prettier every day."

"Poh, Susie! Is that all you and Ruth have to talk about? What does she know of my temper? I do get outrageously cross sometimes, and shall now, if that kettle doesn't boil pretty soon. It's high time it was off."

"I wish it wasn't so far to the store."

"So do I; and then you could come and walk home with me, sometimes in the spring, when the days get longer, and you get stronger," she added, in the playful tone which was such a cordial to Susie's depression. "But we shouldn't quarrel with our bread and butter; should we? I'm all ready for mine."

Susie did not insist on old Ruth's opinion; but her faith in Margaret's perfections was unchanged, as she watched her eating her hurried meal by the gray dawn that now came to aid the red flashes of the firelight. The surroundings were humble enough; the small room scantily furnished, carpetless, and in its early morning disorder; nor did Margaret's dress add much to the picture, a chocolate print, close fitting, and without any attempt

at elegance, save its first element, simplicity ; but, as she stood before the window, a bright tartan shawl wrapped around her, and the early sunlight just tinging the masses of her abundant hair, she was not unpicturesque, though far from being as beautiful as the child regarded her. When the cup was set down, the shawl pinned closely over her well-developed figure, and the straw bonnet with its faded ribbons tied on, no stranger would have looked at her a second time in passing. There was nothing of the elegantly distressed heroine of romance about her. She looked exactly what she was, a store girl on the way to her daily morning tasks.

CHAPTER II.

It was now three years since Margaret Grant had the good fortune to secure a situation in the large establishment of Churchill & Choate, one of the oldest and most respectable firms in the city, and, though not situated in Chestnut street, with its own share of fashionable popularity. Some of the handsomest carriages and best people in town were always to be found there. Highly respectable old ladies, particularly of the Quaker connection, whose wedding-dresses of soft dove-colored silk had been purchased at its counters, brought their daughters in turn to choose the more worldly brocade or *moire*, in which they were to declare their intention of taking to themselves a husband before the assembled "meeting." Substantial families who were contented with the width and comfort of a cross-street house, without even aspiring to the narrower gentility of the West End

squares, made liberal purchases in the spring and autumn, paying cash for the same; and, though it was of rather equivocal advantage to the firm, long bills from those fashionable quarters accumulated greatly at Christmas, particularly in the items of lace and evening-dress generally. Their gloves were native Parisians beyond dispute; and in shawls there was the most unlimited choice, from the comfortable Bay State to the brilliant hues and designs of Delisle, from the last exposition or the faded splendors of real Indian cashmeres. But, if Churchill & Choate had one reputation above another, it was in the household furnishing department. Such blankets and counterpanes! such Irish linen and Russian table napery! such stout Huckabuck and Allendale flannels! It was a treat for any one with housekeeping propensities to inspect them; and it always had been so from the time of young Mr. Churchill's father, who had handed down the reputation of the house, and the wherewithal to sustain it, to his only son, and his faithful head clerk, Caleb Choate, whose conservative principles were sure to check any modern business innovations. It was, perhaps, owing to this balance-wheel in the internal ma-

chinery that the firm owed nothing of their prosperity to outward display and decoration. The younger Mr. Churchill had natural good taste, heightened by artistic cultivation, as was proved by his selections in the department especially under his control; and foreign travel and association had made a visible difference in address between him and the late respected senior partner, Mr. Churchill, who had been the founder of his own fortunes, was bluff, good-natured, and thoroughly respectable. His son, with the same kindly disposition, had an almost womanly gentleness of manner and speech, with an outward reserve the reverse of his father's hilarity. He never could have made their present popularity with all classes, though his well-known integrity sustained it. Mr. Caleb set his worthy face steadily against the spirit of the times, frowning down plate-glass windows and brown stone fronts, loudly asserting that what had made his father's fortune would secure theirs, and that a solid reputation for good articles and fair prices was worth all the gingerbread work of modern architects.

As nearly in the centre of the multiplied wholesale and retail divisions as it was possible to

plant it stood the desk, an awful bar of judgment to delinquent cash boys and late or idle clerks, for it was the post of observation from which Mr. Caleb surveyed all things with a far-seeing scrutiny. Now and then, when it was least expected, he descended from the stool of state, and walked, in an apparently absent way—as if for the moderate exercise which health demanded—through the length and breadth of his domains. The pen, extending stiffly from behind his ear, was not more unbending than Mr. Caleb's figure; the red silk handkerchief flourished at intervals from the desk, now drooped slightly from the pocket of his gray office coat; his shirt collar described an exact angle from his close mown chin; his long thin hands were folded after a fashion of his own, suggestive of a descent from broad brims, and a distant connection with yearly meetings. At the moment of his appearance, absent minded though he seemed, woe to any delinquent on whom his keen eyes fell. Pocket mirrors were replaced with marvellous rapidity by young gentlemen speculating on the whisker crop; groups of damsels, gossiping over the last bit of scandal reported by one fashionable customer to another, sepa-

rated silently, and commenced a hasty rearrangement of dress goods. Order and diligence followed everywhere in the path of the upright Mr. Caleb.

The influence of Mr. Churchill on this great community of employees was quite as great, though outwardly less marked. His father's daily appearance—for the old gentleman had still an unconquerable longing after the scene of his busy life—was the signal for smiles and harmless jests from all quarters; but they would have as soon thought of venturing on a pleasantry with the austere Mr. Caleb, as the younger man, who made his round as a matter of necessity rather than choice. It was quite as well, considering how many bright eyes and fair hands he was in daily contact with, that he had this pride or rather reserve of character. All were not as prudent as Miss Choate, Mr. Caleb's maiden sister, who still occupied her ancient post, and was, by general acquiescence, considered as sub-manager under him of the female flock. Miss Choate's spectacles looked with forbidding coolness on the introduction of all elaborate hair-dressing, whether plaits or curls, and smiled only on the dark prints and

woollen stuffs which she had worn in the days when she first set out to help Caleb "make his fortune," still adhered to, though the object was accomplished.

Such, then, was the internal rule of the highly respectable house of Churchill & Choate, where Margaret's day, from seven in the morning until seven at night, was invariably passed. Cheerful and animated as the whole establishment seemed at the fashionable shopping hour, when a line of carriages stretched around the corner, and their late occupants added brilliancy to the interior by rich and fanciful toilets, it was scarcely even comfortable when the arrivals for the day began. Cotton hangings secured the costly fabrics on the shelves from the dust of a daily cleansing; the counters were empty, the windows undraped, the uncarpeted floor so cold, the atmosphere gray and chilly everywhere.

Margaret always dreaded this beginning of her day. Fresh from home, and the recollection of its annoyances, they pressed more heavily in the midst of physical discomforts. It was especially so now. She could not rid herself of Susie's suggestion. Why, indeed, could they not have a

home of their own, free from the exactions demanded of herself, and the constant tyranny to which the child was exposed? What claim had the father's wife on her hard earnings, more and more absorbed in the household expenses, while the simplest necessities of her dress were allowed to her grudgingly? Her daily associates led, by comparison, gay, pleasant lives. They talked of balls, and parties, and concerts, after the fashion of those whom they served. She had never known an evening's indulgence with all her passionate love of music. Was it just, this hard, self-denying life, to herself, and, above all, to Susie, with her bright, quick intellect, and a voice, her mother's voice, though stronger and richer, almost thrilling, even with the lack of all cultivation? This surely ought to be developed and trained as a means of livelihood. Susie would never be well enough to stand behind a counter, lifting and folding heavy fabrics, that made her own strong arms ache with fatigue—or, worse still, to bend over her needle at the trade Mrs. Grant was always threatening her with. Margaret's face grew grave, almost to sullenness, as a rash determination of escape, at all hazards, sprang up; and her hands

busied themselves abstractedly in the arrangement of her wares.

“I’d thank you to let my pattern-cards alone,” said a pettish disagreeable voice at her side, for she was searching boxes in charge of her next neighbor as she indulged in this bitter reverie.

This young girl, whose companionship was particularly distasteful to Margaret, was a general favorite with their regular customers, and took airs accordingly. She knew that many of them would wait to be served by her, and that the knowledge of this attraction was not without weight at headquarters. Even Miss Choate, with her rigid notion of dress and propriety, overlooked many a fault in Addie Long, and was always ready to shield her from Mr. Caleb’s displeasure. But with her pretty face and winning manner, she was giddy and frivolous, without a thought save dress and admiration. It was not amiability, but to win this needful stimulant, that she had a smile for every lady customer, and a glance for every gentleman awaiting a wife or sister’s purchase. She could never understand how the grave and quiet Margaret was almost, if not quite as great a favorite as herself; but she was in

some sort, a rival, and therefore to be annoyed with the petty shafts of ill-natured jealousy. "You are growing very careless and disagreeable, Margaret Grant, I can tell you," she added, though Margaret had instantly resigned the box with an apology. "I'm not the only one that sees it, either. I heard your name at the desk, last night, while I was kept waiting with that last bill of goods. Mr. Caleb it was, and Mr. Churchill himself. I shouldn't like to be brought up by him, with all his smooth words. You needn't get so red over it."

Margaret's face grew scarlet. She was over sensitive to blame. That was a part of her nature; and this she felt was undeserved. She had been unhappy for a month past, ever since the first sharp autumn days had added to Susie's hardships; but she could not accuse herself of the least neglect. The young girl's loud tone had attracted the attention of all around; and yet the charge was so indefinite that she could say nothing in return. It was the commencement of a weary morning, and made her apparently guilty of the very faults with which she had been charged. She could not bring her thoughts to

the work before her. Twice her bills were sent back from the desk with an error in the reckoning marked by Mr. Caleb himself. She named wrong prices, forgot her measurements, and answered all questions with preoccupied abstraction that excited the remark of all around her.

Never had she been more thankful to hear the measured stroke of the State House clock, which released her for the noon recess. She longed to be alone; but the dressing-room was in a stir and hum as she entered it.

A good-natured girl, with no pretensions to beauty, ran up to her.

“Do come with us for once in your life, Margaret. Let your lunch be for to-morrow; ’twill save you just so much trouble.”

“Come? Where?” said she, wishing in her heart they would go anywhere, so that she could have her coveted quiet.

“To Brooks’s first. I know you think we are awfully extravagant.”

“It’s my treat, though,” said another, tying her bonnet before the little mirror. “Come on! cream-cakes and coffee; and then we’re going through Second Street to look at hats. I saw a beauty at White’s—pink uncut velvet.”

“Addie Long says she is going to have pink velvet, Marianne.”

“Then I won't; that's certain.” And the speaker spread out the very elaborate bows she had been tying. “What are you going to have, Margaret?”

“Nothing new, that I know of,” said Margaret, forcing herself to be interested, or, at least, to listen pleasantly to the chatter of these foolish girls, who daily fostered an unhealthy appetite by dainties, and spent every dollar that remained on dress.

“I declare! you're not a bit like other people!” said Marianne. “Where's my shawl, girls? Do somebody look for it! I don't believe you'll ever be married.”

“I don't suppose I ever shall.”

“Well, I mean to; that's certain, if I can find any one to have me. Come Ellen Boyne! Betty, do hurry! can't you? I should hate to think I'd got to settle down into an old maid.”

“Like ‘Spectacles.’” And Ellen Boyne pointed over her shoulder to the brown silk bonnet of Miss Choate, occupying the highest peg in the room.

Bang went the green baize door at last, swinging to upon their noisy exit; and Margaret had the quiet which she craved.

“I don’t suppose I ever shall” had been said in grave earnest, for she was slowly renouncing the one bright dream which colors every young girl’s life. With the giddy creatures who had just left her, it was a vision of flattering attention never to cease—of unrestrained liberty, and dress, and sight-seeing. With Margaret, it was the hope of finding the affection and companionship which she had yearned for ever since her mother’s death, which her father, even when kindest, never could wholly satisfy, and Susie’s clinging, grateful heart was too childish and inexperienced to give. She never had had, like most other girls, intimate friends of her own age. It was not pride which kept her from the association, but a lack of sympathy in what occupied her thoughts. She could talk to old Ruth of her troubles; and the good woman had always some kind and consoling thing to say; but Ruth was uneducated, with all her honest goodness; and Margaret’s mental advancement, commenced by her mother, and carried on mostly in this precious

noon hour, had been rapid even beyond her own realization. Books were to be had for the hire and they were the one self-indulgence of her busy life. To-day she could not read. One courageous, prayerful thought, and the difficulties which beset her would have resolved themselves into the phantoms they so often proved, or Heaven-sent trials, bringing with them their own strength; but she could not even pray. The last random words of those who had just left her filled her heart, already brooding over the sorrows of her young life, with inexpressible bitterness. "No; I shall never marry," she said to herself, slowly. "Who would ever ask me to be a wife, that I could love and respect, as I must a husband? Then there are father and Susie! Poor father! poor Susie!"

Some one opened the door rudely. It was a messenger in search of her, with an unusual and startling summons. Mr. Choate desired to see her in the office immediately."

Once a month, they entered, in turn, this inner shrine of Mr. Caleb's authority to receive, from his exact hands, the amount of salary due, and to give a receipt for the same. Otherwise,

Margaret had never entered it in the three years of her service; and she knew that even Miss Choate seldom ventured to penetrate so far into Mr. Caleb's confidence. He was there before her, seated with all the authority of a magistrate at the table, his spectacles perched on the upreared lock of iron gray hair above his forehead. But he was not alone. Mr. Churchill stood by the window, though he only bowed as she entered, and did not move or speak.

"I am sorry to cut short your hour of relaxation. Ahem! Take a chair, Miss Grant," prefaced Mr. Caleb.

For the moment, Margaret could not even guess for what she was arraigned. Something of importance, with all this solemn preparation; and then Adelaide Long's taunt, and the carelessness which she knew herself to have been guilty of since then, flashed into her mind.

"Sorry to have to trouble you on such an unpleasant business," continued Mr. Caleb, waving his hand stiffly before the still vacant chair. But it's best for all parties that the investigation should be made at once. Do you know—to come to the point—any thing of a robe, No. 297, brought

from the wholesale department on the 27th of last month?"

"Sir?" said the bewildered Margaret, not comprehending the insinuated charge against her.

"A *robe à volant*," said Mr. Caleb, with a decidedly English accent, and referring to the memorandum before him. No. 297, A. X.; three flounces, in oriental scroll pattern blue and silver."

Margaret remembered it perfectly well. It was in Ellen Boyne's hands at the time it was shown her; and Adelaide Long took it from her, and held it up in all lights, saying how very becoming it would be to Mrs. John Thompson, a leader in fashionable society, a blonde beauty. Miss Adelaide flattered herself that she bore a strong resemblance to her.

Mr. Caleb drew off his spectacles, and replaced them in his red morroco case, as he silently awaited Margaret's answer.

"I have seen the dress—I recollect it," faltered Margaret, beginning to comprehend that the robe was missing, and suspicion was directed towards her; and conscious at the same time, that Mr. Churchill had turned, and was listening

to her answer. She felt his full, penetrating eyes as they were fixed on her face, and the quick color rushed to her cheek and forehead.

“ Ah, you recollect it,” and Mr. Caleb made a note on the back of the memorandum. “ It was on or near the 27th that you saw it, that was Friday, two weeks ago Friday.”

“ Yes, sir ; that was the day ; it was sent for to show Mrs. Ashton.”

“ Precisely. Now when did you see it last.”

Mr. Caleb took great credit to himself, for the framing of this inquiry ; he expected it to startle forth an instant confession, or an involved reply that would settle the matter as easily.

But Margaret said nothing for a moment ; she was trying in vain to recollect ; all was confusion and shame. At any other time, she would have borne the examination and answered quietly, but disturbed as she had been all the morning, self-control deserted her. She did not resent the implied accusation, but it stung her, and the presence of Mr. Churchill, seldom consulted in the details of the establishment, made it doubly humiliating.

“ Indeed, Mr. Caleb, I do not know ; I cannot

tell; I do not believe that I have seen it since that day."

"Yes, or no, Miss Grant, if you please. Have you seen it since or not? It is highly important that we should be precise and definite. The box is gone, not without hands."

When was Mr. Caleb any thing but "precise" and "definite"? Margaret looked up at him as he spoke, sitting there almost as rigid as the iron form of his counting-house chair. Mr. Churchill was still listening; it recalled her to herself, as she noticed this.

"I have not seen the silk," she said more firmly than she had yet spoken, and choking down the sobs of womanly shame and mortification that she felt rising up within her. "I know nothing of it since that day. I have nothing more to say."

"You may go," said Mr. Caleb, glancing up at his partner to see if he had any inquiry to make; "and be so good as not to mention to any one the subject of our present conversation."

There was not the slightest variation of voice or feature as he spoke. No one could have told whether he was dismissing a convicted criminal,

or a person in whose innocence he had always held an unshaken faith. Margaret turned, still proudly as she had last spoken, but with a cruel sense of injustice and shame, which no concealment could crush.

Mr. Churchill stepped quickly before her, and laid his hand upon the lock. Mr. Caleb coughed, and turned the chair with a warning creak; but both signals were unheeded by the younger man. He met Margaret's almost defiant look with one so kind, so troubled, that her resolution almost failed her.

"I wish you to understand, before you go, Miss Grant, that Mr. Choate makes no distinct charge against you, and that it was not my wish to have you questioned. You will believe me when I say that I never have for a moment supposed that you were implicated in this unhappy affair."

He even held out his hand in his eagerness to reassure her, as if he wished to convince her by a departure from his usual reserve. It was very kind in him, almost brotherly. Margaret felt it to be, and wished that she had a brother could resent this accusation, and have her innocence

fully established at once. She longed to take the hand so frankly extended, and thank him; but the distance between them was too great. She remembered it, if he did not; but she looked up once more to show him that she was not ungrateful for his sympathy, and met his kindly glance now with quivering lips and eyes full of hot, blinding tears.

CHAPTER III.

POOR little Susie! She fully intended, when Margaret left her, to be very good all day, and try to please the dearest and best sister in the world. But every thing seemed against her. The fire, after its treacherous promises, would not go on burning, but fell apart, and smoked sullenly at her attempts to revive it again. The children made their appearance in the midst of her efforts, both clamoring to be dressed at once, and so wakened the baby, who declined every invitation to be quiet and amuse itself on the floor, while she washed the dirty little faces and forced the stiff brass buttons of jackets and trousers through button-holes that never were made large enough ; Susie almost thought it was done purposely.

Then came a search for Washington's shoe, carrying about the baby who would not be put off another moment, as she looked ; and when it

was at length found under the bed where it had fallen when "shied" at his brother the night before, the string was in a hard knot which resisted alike the efforts of teeth and her still benumbed fingers.

Of course there were no preparations for breakfast, and she was blamed for it all, when Mrs. Grant made her appearance cap in hand, and her untidy dress not yet fastened. She had evidently stepped out of bed after that fashion graphically described as "the wrong way," and her ill-humor continued to vent itself the whole morning—on her husband, for not bringing wash-water from the court hydrant, unbidden; on the children, for getting under foot and running the perpetual risk of being scalded by boiling suds; and on Susie, for every one of these offences, with numberless other accusations, especially her own.

How Susie hated washing-days, with their slop, and steam, and general discomfort! How she vowed to herself, as she dragged the baby along on one arm, and a pail of rinsing water on the other, that, if ever *she* grew up and was married, she would never have a thing washed

from one year's end to the other, though she would never marry, for that matter, if children were always as cross as her three little brothers; and then she subsided into her Utopia again, a lovely room, in which Margaret and herself lived all alone together, always as neat and tidy as old Ruth's, with a little stove which made it warm and comfortable even in the night, when her side kept her awake. She would have plenty of books, all story-books too, not such stupid dry things as Margaret liked. There was one vague ambition that could not shape itself, it was too high for even Susie's soaring imagination to make reality—the power of fit utterance to the wild passionate music in her heart, to wake those thrilling surges of sound which she heard in the Sunday service roll though the old church, with the deep chorus of “men and women singers.”

Church music was all that Susie had ever heard, and she learned the hymns and anthems with scarcely an effort at remembrance. Above all, she loved the plaintive minors of the Lenten season; and it was a strange thing to hear the fine old melodies of Purcell or Handel sung at the door of a miserable dwelling, to hush a fretful

child, instead of the time worn-lullabies of nurses, or the still more unmeaning songs of the people. But Susie often sung away her care and loneliness watching for Margaret in the dusky, ill-lighted street, until rudely recalled to harsher discords than any her true ear had ever known, which jarred all the more unpleasantly for the spirit of the twilight and the song.

The baby, called Leander after some favorite hero of romance, for Mrs. Grant had been a great novel-reader in her day, did condescend to take a nap in the afternoon; and was deposited in his wooden cradle, with a sigh of relief by his weary little nurse.

Now, she thought to creep away to their own room, where she could wrap her cloak around her, and read a little while in peace before it was quite dark. But Mrs. Grant, preparing to wash up the kitchen floor, was not unobservant. "Su-san!" she called after the child in her shrillest voice, "where's the boys?"

"I don't know."

Susie sat down on the stairs as she said it, with a rebellious rising of the will she did not try to check.

“ Well, suppose you find out, then. I can’t go and hunt ’em up; and it’s high time they were in.”

“ I have a great mind not to stir a step,” thought Susie. “ I’ve been running every minute to-day; and it’s so slippery and cold! I don’t care if she does punish me. They always run around the corner the minute they see me coming; and I have to *chase* after them. But I suppose I must. Oh, good! I’ll go and see Ruth a little while, and get warm.”

“ Susan!” called Mrs. Grant again, “ you’d better not have me come after you, if you know what’s good for yourself.”

The child waited for no further summons, but snatched up her hood, and dodged the box on the ear, which past experience taught her to expect, as she went through the kitchen.

The pavement was very slippery, for nearly every one in the court had been washing as well as Mrs. Grant; and the way to the hydrant that supplied them all with water was marked by icy glares, the splashes of the water-pails freezing as they fell. The wind whirled up clouds of dust from the ash-heap, and rattled the tin signs of the shoe-

maker and tailoress, who pursued their avocation in this out-of-the-way locality.

Mrs. Norton, or "old Ruth," as almost every one called her, lived still within a court, which was only a narrow alley-way arched over between two houses; but, when this was passed, no visitor could regret that it was so shut off from the confusion and filth of the outer street. The whole space in front of the one-story wooden tenement, in which she had a life-interest, was scarcely ten feet square; yet under the window was a little flower-border, where roses and sweet-williams consented to grow in summer, more in gratitude for Ruth's constant attendance than for any sunshine streaming over the sloping, dilapidated roofs that shut them in. In winter, only, the flat door-step, and the neatness of the old-fashioned, uneven stone flagging, gave evidence of Ruth's open-air industry.

The door opened directly into the principal room of the dwelling. There had been, originally, no division; but Ruth's ideas of propriety had suggested the partitioning off of one corner as a bed-chamber, which gave the outer apartment an odd, triangular shape. Here she sat at her work

all day long, always contented and cheerful, notwithstanding a life marked by many losses and crosses, glancing up now and then, by way of refreshment, at the roses blossoming on the window-ledge. She had always wanted a bird to make up her companionship; but the time had not yet come that she could afford to keep one. "Not while there are so many hungry mouths to feed in the neighborhood," she was just saying, as Susie, sure of her welcome, opened the door rather unceremoniously. "But flowers don't eat anything."

The child was abashed to find herself face to face with a tall, handsomely-dressed lady, who was admiring the healthy-looking plants. She would have retreated immediately, if Ruth had not called to her to come in, while the lady herself smiled pleasantly, and asked if this was a grandchild.

"Oh no, Miss Agnes!" said Ruth, quickly. "*She* was all I had. That was what made it so hard when she came to give up, and settle down with the cough, just as her father did before her. I never can forget your goodness, coming to see her to the last, or how she always took to you, poor dear!"

Ruth, after the fashion of her class, raised the corner of her clean gingham apron to her eyes, those clear, soft eyes, to which tears sprang so quickly, though they never stayed there long.

The lady's face looked graver ; and Susie knew that they were talking of Ruth's daughter, who had died three years before.

“ I can see just how she used to lean back in that very chair by the window, watching for you afternoons, just as calm as a baby, I might say, though I was ready to cry every time I looked at her. Her hands were so thin ! and they used to be such busy hands, too, for me and everybody ; and her cheeks as pink as the ribbons in your bonnet, Miss Agnes. So was her father's, always, from the time he took to the house.”

“ She had a very lovely face,” the lady said, in the pause.

“ Yes, ma'am ; so she had, though I say it, more and more so, till she was laid in her coffin. But I don't rebel, Miss Agnes ! I don't rebel ! She taught me 'twas wicked and sinful ; and I can never forget that it was you who made her understand it all, and grow so patient, while her poor father fretted against his sickness till the

day of his death. But it's hard for a poor man to know he's going to leave his wife and his baby without a house nor a home,—only the Lord provided that when he wasn't here to see it," Ruth added, as if fearful that she had thrown some faint shadow on the memory she still cherished so sacredly.

"Yes; I can understand it," her visitor said, gently. "The rich are spared that bitterness in death; but they have their own trials of faith, Mrs. Norton. God apportions the joys and sorrows of life far more equally than we often think."

"*She* used to say: 'Miss Agnes will have her reward, mother, for giving up her time to us poor girls—and coming to read to her, as you did, hour after hour, all the same whether it was pleasant or stormy—walking, too.'"

"I *have had* my reward," the lady said, earnestly, and quickly, too, as if she did not like to listen to her own praise, "knowing that I was a comfort to Mary, and that she left you the precious legacy of her clear, undoubting faith. I've given up the Bible class, though—did I tell you?—and am teaching little people again. I

wonder if this young neighbor of yours would not like to join us? or do you go to Sunday-school already?"

"Susie, her name is," said Ruth, by way of introduction, as the child showed a disposition to slide still further behind her old friend, and vanish altogether out of sight on the first opportunity. "Can't you speak to the lady, Susie? A neighbor's child, ma'am. Her mother always went to St. Peter's church; and 'twas she that first talked to me about sending Mary to Sunday-school, when she was no bigger than Susie there."

"And how is it that she does not send her own children? I don't think I remember Miss Susie's face, though she doesn't intend to let me see it very plainly, I think."

"Oh, she used to send Margaret—the other one—always, ma'am; but that was before your day, Miss Agnes. You never saw her sister, did you? though she was a great comfort—next to you and Mr. Ogden—to my poor girl, Mary—she used to say he was a minister, that followed his Master in looking after the poor and the sick, if there ever was one. But Susie's sister had to stay at home—I was going to tell you—after

awhile, to take care of this one; and, when you used to come here so much, she never had a minute in the week-days to herself."

"So her sister used to come to Sunday-school, did she? and what's to hinder Susie from coming now?"

"Well, I can't say, Miss." And Ruth shook her head, in a manner that would not have been very complimentary to the present Mrs. Grant, if understood.

"Should you like to come?" And the lady turned to Susie again.

The child, whose quick sympathies had already gone out to the gentle-looking woman, glanced up eagerly, her large eyes expressing all that her timidity would not allow her to say.

"Oh, if she would *only* let me!"

"Her stepmother," Ruth said, in explanation. "Her father is married again. I'm afraid Mrs. Grant won't think she can spare her."

"Well, suppose I come and see your mother some day when I am in the neighborhood? Shall I, Susie, and ask her to let you be one of my little people?" Miss Agnes said, rising to go.

"If you *please!*" And Susie thought that even

Mrs. Grant could not refuse a request to one who smiled so pleasantly, and had such a gentle voice—though a doubt, which she would not listen to, spoke, at the same time, way down at the bottom of her heart.

Ruth was more cheery, many a day, for that visit; and the lady herself went on her way, scarcely heeding how far from home she was, and how rapidly night was falling, in her thankfulness that she had summoned up resolution to go in such inclement weather among the poor and desolate, speaking to them of the Friend who has commended all such to “the rich and increased in goods.” Pity it is that so few among them remember the loving charge!

As for Susie, whatever she had intended to say to her old friend, there was no time for it now. She suddenly remembered her errand abroad, and that it was almost dark, with Mrs. Grant's stray lambs still unsought.

Washington was rescued from a corner fight with boys much larger than himself, who had torn his apron, and bruised his face, from bad generalship on his part, unworthy of the name he bore.

Alonzo, generally called “Al,” gave less trou-

ble in the capture, being engaged with other urchins, nearer home, in sliding around the hydrant, his little cold hands thrust into the pockets of his ragged trowsers, and his cap pulled down as far as possible, to shield the tip of his round red nose. He *had* had a very nice time; but now his feet were chilled, and his hands ached; so he was just ready to be as cross and sleepy as possible the instant he got into the warm kitchen.

Susie toiled between her two unsatisfied little taskmasters, until they were fairly in bed, too thankful to escape the scolding for her long absence, which she expected every moment from their mother, to remonstrate with them.

This had been her daily life since the new household rule began—not an hour in the twenty-four given her for study or play; and this it would probably continue, until she should be old enough to learn the threatened trade, still more hateful, in prospect.

CHAPTER IV.

“SHE was lovely, sister,” said Susie, enthusiastically, from her ark of refuge, the bed—“almost as pretty as you are.”

She had been trying to describe Ruth's visitor, and her kind way of speaking and looking at her; but she thought Margaret was not nearly as much interested as she had expected her to be; but she tried not to feel hurt, because “maybe Margaret had a headache. She often did have, in the busy season, when night came.”

“Was she?” said the elder sister, absently, evidently not having appreciated the complimentary remark of her one admirer.

“And she promised to come and ask mother to let me go to Sunday-school. Do you think she will? Mother—I should think she might.”

“I would not think too much of it.”

Margaret made a determined effort to lay aside

the troubles of the day, and enter into Susie's plans.

"What is it like, sister? Ruth told her you used to go. It must be real nice to sing and say hymns with so many other little girls. I never did know many little girls. 'Most everybody else does. Why don't you ever let me, Margaret?"

Susie's anticipations had made her talkative.

"Because there are so many bad children playing about the streets; and I was afraid you would learn their ways, if I let you play with them, and to say their coarse, rude words, such things as the boys say sometimes, and worse."

"It's a great while to wait till some day; isn't it, sister?"

Susie was perfectly satisfied with the explanation. It was the plan their own mother had followed with Margaret, when poverty forced them into closer contact with sin and ignorance, in turn pursued by her, with Susie. It had preserved the innate ladyhood and refinement of character which the first Mrs. Grant prized next to her faith, and which, in her, sprang from it, as she learned to follow "whatsoever is lovely, and pure, and of good report."

“Suppose I ask for you,” said Margaret, “in the morning, if she is pretty good-natured? Shall I? That would be better than worrying about it two or three weeks, I think; and then, if she says ‘no,’ why, you can put it out of your mind at once; and it won’t be quite such a great disappointment.”

“Oh, I should think she might! just once a day. I wouldn’t ask to go twice.” And Susie’s tone plainly showed that refusal would be a great disappointment, come when it might. “She never lets me go to church any more, or only once in such a great while. I always thought the children looked so nice coming across the churchyard, two and two, with their teachers walking before them.” And the small procession flitted before Susie’s imagination, as it had done many a time that evening; and she heard the patter of little feet crossing the marble pavement of the chancel, and pictured herself close under the protection of her new friend, and holding some good little girl, Margaret would not be afraid of, tightly by the hand.

Margaret saw that she was growing restless and excited.

“It’s high time you were going to sleep, young lady. I’m almost through this great darn that

spoiled our story to-night. See! I have a very nice plan. Don't you know she *did* promise that you could come up to the store, some day, for me? and she can't very well say 'no' to both things at once. So, if she won't say 'Sunday-school,' I'll ask for a holiday in the afternoon. That will be some comfort; won't it?"

There was a movement in the next room, showing that some one was still busy there, and a light was shining through the crevice of the ill-fitting door. The sisters were evidently accustomed to it, for neither remarked upon the monotonous sound of alternate filing and tapping, varied by the sharp click, as of some fine machinery, now and then. But, just as Susie turned, for the twentieth time, away from the light, Mr. Grant himself looked hurriedly in, shading his eyes, as if the lamp was too bright for him, or from habit while at his daily occupation.

"I thought I heard you up yet, Margaret; just step in here one minute. I've certainly found out the trouble at last. Come and see how smoothly it works."

This was nothing new, either. Her father had been at work upon the model of some new motive-

power almost ever since Margaret could remember; and she had been called on to sympathize with wonderful discoveries and disastrous failures until she had come to have very little faith, or even interest, in Mr. Grant's absorbing occupation. Her mother had filled the post before her, more patiently, but with just as little hope of any good resulting from it. The present Mrs. Grant made no scruple of declaring that "it was a shameful waste of time and money; and he had better stick to his business."

The room which had seen such alternation of hope and despondency was smaller than Margaret's, scarcely more than a light closet. There was a little stove in the centre, the rusty grate showing how rarely it was used. A work-bench, or table, was fitted beneath the window; and the well-worn leather-covered stool before it was the only other article of furniture. Mr. Grant brushed away the implements scattered upon the bench; and Margaret noticed, as he did so, an untouched order in his regular business as repairer and maker of watches, which she knew he had received more than a week before. As he lifted the shade of the spirit-lamp, the strong light flashed full upon his

wan face and thin gray hair; while his sunken eyes burned with the fire of a confirmed enthusiast, scarcely less than the glare of a monomaniac, in the intensity of the moment's excitement.

"See," he said, touching a small brass model, a complication of wheels and levers, almost as delicate as the mechanism of a watch, and far more intricate; "it works without that catch now; that was all that was wanting; they said so when it was returned from the patent office. See! quick, Margaret, it does not even shiver, it works so smoothly. See! see!"

Click! click! sounded the whirring wheels, as the delicate machinery sped across the table as if attracted by a magnet, then back again as rapidly, without any apparent jar, to its eager inventor, who caught it up, and could have kissed it, as he turned triumphantly to Margaret.

"There! It's done at last. It's the work of more years than you are old, child; one of the most wonderful discoveries man ever made; the steam-engine would always have been incomplete without it; Adams allowed that, and Dunlap has pledged himself to get the patent through as soon as I could manage that halt. Don't you see, it's

all done away with? don't you see?" he asked again impatiently, eager for new confirmation.

Margaret tried to understand the oft reiterated explanation of conflicting forces and mechanical laws, that were still a dead letter to her, while her father poured forth his triumphant review of obstacles encountered and overcome, and the grand results, fame and fortune, that were within his grasp. She would gladly have been less unbelieving, but she knew how many years had already been wasted, what sums of money wrung from the necessities of the family had been swallowed up in these endless experiments. She would have been still more heavy-hearted, as she looked into that worn, eager face, if she had known, as he did, how nearly he had exhausted the patience and support of the gentlemen he had named, who had been induced to assist him by his own unbounded confidence of ultimate success.

It was a story as old as the struggle of human ingenuity with the great mechanical problems which some have conquered, but by far the greater number are mocked by, while time, and means, and life are madly squandered, even reason at last being added to the sacrifice.

“Yes, father,” Margaret said, in his first pause of expectancy; he would have told it all to the very walls, if there had been no other listener, in his feverish excitement.

“But *you don't see; you won't understand,*” he cried out, dashing down the graver with which he had been explaining his final success. “Nobody will! they let Fulton starve, and many a better man go mad, with their blind stupidity! you're like all the rest!”

“But, father,” said Margaret soothingly, and laying her hand on his arm, “you cannot expect me really to understand it as you or Mr. Dunlap does; it seems to run just as smoothly as possible, without that jerking motion it used to have.”

“Does it? That's the very thing!”

Mr. Grant started up again, catching at this shadow of encouragement. “Of course they'll see it, anybody would, with half an eye, and I can have the drawings ready to send to the patent office in two days. If I only could get them to advance me something to keep body and soul together, with such a fortune as that, in another month, too. You couldn't let me have a dollar or so, could you, Margaret?”

The change from the high proud tone of conscious triumph, to the hesitating request preferred so often before, and now in the half wheedling tone of one accustomed to sue for favors at the risk of refusal, pained Margaret more than her anticipation of a fresh disappointment for him. By this loving and faithful daughter he had never been refused, even to the last coin hoarded for some pressing personal need. She drew out her purse, now, without a word, and almost emptied it into his outstretched hand; little enough there was, it is true, and she unconsciously turned away her face, lest she should meet the expression she knew was in his own, half shame, half covetous. It was one of those changes in him, over which she had silent heart-aches, the reverse of his naturally generous and open nature.

“Good-night, sir,” she said, yielding him the homage of dutiful respect nevertheless; and then tried to say playfully, “I hope the fortune will come soon, father; it’s almost time Susie was sent to school, if you are going to make a teacher of her as you promised.”

“A lady, Margaret—ladies of you both, all in good time, all in good time,” and Margaret went

back to find Susie still awake, excited by the sound of their voices ; and the hope, notwithstanding repeated warnings, that Mrs. Grant would allow her both the coveted pleasures. She had tried to “make herself go to sleep,” but every invalid knows what hard work this sometimes proves, when mind and body are both leagued against unconsciousness. Susie was really an invalid ; though she would not acknowledge to herself, still less to Margaret, how hot and feverish she felt, and how steady and sharp the pain in her side had become. She knew it would put an end to all expeditions, and though scarcely able to rise when morning came, suffered no complaint to escape her lips.

CHAPTER V.

CONTRARY to her usual custom, and much to Susie's joy, Mrs. Grant made her appearance the next morning before Margaret had finished her solitary breakfast; and the important request was made at once. It was received much as Margaret had expected. Mrs. Grant expressed her opinion that "Sunday schools were all nonsense;" and, if she spared Susan to go to church once a day, it was as much as anybody ought to expect of her. The only day in the week, too, when she had five minutes to herself!

As to going to the store, "it was just as ridiculous. What in the world was that child going to do all by herself above the Exchange when she was so dumb she could scarcely find Second Street Market? But, if Margaret chose to get her into a scrape, she could get her out of it. That was all. *She* had nothing to say about it. Their father

never would interfere, but let some people ride over everybody's heads."

So Margaret left her sister half sorrowful, half comforted, and carried with her her own troubles unshared and unrelieved. She was wronging herself; but she did not then understand the secret of laying down yesterday's burden, and setting out in the strength of a morning thanksgiving for the blessings she could number for the day. Old Ruth, watering her geraniums, and peering carefully for withered leaves or promising young buds, humming away to herself as she did so, could have taught her this, or rather recalled one of her mother's earliest lessons.

But we are all thus inclined to suffer cares and crosses to accumulate before we act upon the practical wisdom of the proverb, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

"Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others, that we are not always strong,
That we are ever overborne with care,
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled when with us in prayer.
And joy, and strength, and courage are with Thee?"

Of course, Susie thought that the clock had stopped, that three o'clock never would come, that the children had never been so troublesome before.

It was a wonderful experience to the child who had never been in the fashionable quarter of the city. Margaret had given her some pennies to pay her omnibus fare as far as the Exchange, and special directions what streets to go through after she left it ; so she started forth very courageously, not at all damped by Mrs. Grant's ungracious looks, and speedily found her way into Second Street where she was to take the omnibus. But one after another passed ; and she still stood on the corner, unable to summon sufficient courage to stop one. Her faint signals were disregarded ; and the great, noisy vehicles rolled on, while the short afternoon was getting still shorter.

Presently, to her dismay, she saw a great rough boy, who had been watching her as he came along, swinging an empty basket on his arm, halt directly in front of her, with a look that made her very uncomfortable. The next omnibus had just made its appearance in the distance ; and she had gone out to the very edge of the curbstone, resolved not to be left this time.

"I thought as much," said the boy, coming closer still. "Shall I stop her for you?"

Susie eyed him doubtfully from under her

hood; but he looked very good-natured; and she nodded yes, though putting the lamp-post between them to make assurance double sure. "How nice it must be not to feel afraid of any thing!" she thought, as the boy sang out: "Hullo! stop them gay horses of yourn, and take in this little girl, old Six-on-a-side!"

How could she ever climb up that great step? But an old gentleman inside lifted her up, and deposited her on a seat by him, as if she had been no heavier than a baby.

The omnibus was full, as Second Street omnibuses always are; and, if it had not been for this new protector, she might have stood up all the way. Three stout huckster-women, with baskets as portly as themselves, were going as far as the market, having just come from a Red Bank ferry-boat with supplies for the early opening of Wednesday morning. They nodded to each other over their double chins, and talked about the early "cold snap," and the effect it would have on the price of butter and eggs at Christmas. Then there was a pale man buttoned up to his chin, in a thread-bare overcoat, and seeming in a great hurry to get to his journey's end. Every time a passenger

showed a disposition to get out or in, he pulled the check-string, and asked the driver if he "couldn't hurry up," which of course delayed him by just so many seconds.

Susie noted all these things with wide-open, curious eyes, as young travellers are inclined to scan all they chance to meet with. She did not at all fancy the young girl in a showy plaid dress, without gloves, and having a great many rings on her hands, and an enormous brooch, with purple stones in it, fastening her shawl at the throat. Her nearest neighbor, who looked scarcely older—though she held a dear little baby all wrapped up in a flannel blanket bound with pink ribbon—drew herself away as far as possible from the plaid dress, and curls, and bold black eyes, and talked a great deal to a young man, her husband, who seemed very proud of her and the baby too. Susie liked them better than any of the rest, excepting always her protector, towards whom she nestled occasionally to reassure herself in this close contact with so many strange faces. The old gentleman watched them too, for it was a pleasant thing to see the young mother pull down a corner of the blanket every now and then, and look admiringly on the

placid little face in its thulle-bordered cap, then up at her husband with a shy, happy smile; while he, pretending to think her a foolish child, contrived to get a peep at the little one himself on every opportunity.

So the omnibus rattled on—past the market where the stout women got out, and lifted their baskets after them, to the terror of the young mother and the danger of Susie's hood, which was knocked over her eyes unceremoniously—past furniture warehouses and ready-made clothing establishments, and finally swung round into the noisy, clattering Square of the Exchange.

The old gentleman did not forget Susie, but paid her fare with his own, just as she began to feel quite miserable at the impossibility of reaching the driver's hand, even though she mounted a seat, and stood on tiptoe. She tendered the three pennies he had advanced very gratefully; but he bade her keep such small change for herself, and posted away up Walnut Street as briskly as many a far younger man could do.

Susie wished he had taken the same way she must pass, through the rabble of newsboys she was destined to encounter, shouting, "Evening

Bulletin! Arrival of the steamer!" in their shrill, locust-like voices. A great many gentlemen were hurrying along the narrow pavement, scarcely looking to the right or left; and she was almost breathless when she turned the corner, and came suddenly into Chestnut Street, with its gay shops and beautiful women sauntering slowly along in strange contrast to the bustle and fever their husbands and fathers lived in from morning till night.

No wonder that the child was fascinated, and listened, and forgot her errand, as the bright panorama of shop-windows seemed to stretch away endlessly; while the stream of passers-by mingled and swept past in endless variety of light and shade, confusing, dazzling, and bewildering her, whichever way she looked.

It was growing dusky and very cold in the street before Susie could "turn away her eyes from beholding vanities," and hurry on towards the more quiet vicinity of Churchill & Choate's. She had no idea that she should find one of those great establishments that had so fascinated her, and stood looking up and down the street for some humbler place of trade at the very threshold which Margaret had just left, after an anxious watch for her.

There were several handsome carriages drawn up to the pavement; and, while she stood watching the long, brilliantly lighted vista within, and thinking dismally that she must have lost her way, and what was to become of her, a still more showy equipage stopped close beside her.

“Churchill’s, ma’am,” the driver said, as he opened the door, and touched his hat respectfully.

Churchill’s! Why, so it was! She could make out the great white letters above the door now. Oh, how handsome it was! Susie’s heart gave a great bound of delight, partly that she had reached her journey’s end in safety, but quite as much of pleasure and satisfaction that Margaret had such a nice place to stay in all day. Yet Margaret wasn’t in the least proud.

All this was suddenly clouded by a recollection that she had still to make her way among all those people, and with such a bright light right in her face, to Margaret’s counter, wherever that was. How should she ever find her? There seemed, as she looked in again still more wistfully, to be two or three stores branching off in all directions from the great high desk in the middle, where the odd little man stood, counting out change, and scratching away in the great book before him.

The lady swept past her with a great rustle of flounces ; and with her came a little girl about Susie's age, though dressed almost as elaborately as her mother. Though astonished at her magnificence, Susie decided, from a glimpse at the face of this miniature fashion-plate, that it was a little girl ; and it gave her courage to follow them in, and part way up the centre of the store, where they suddenly disappeared down one of the branching departments, leaving her in great doubt and perplexity.

There were several boys running about with slips of paper and bank-bills in their hands. She ventured to speak to one of them, ashamed to be seen standing still, as if she had no business there. "Do you know where my sister is?" And, faint as the voice was, the sound of it frightened her still more.

The youngster looked at her curiously for a minute, and then brushed roughly by, saying : "How do I know who your sister is?"

He was much better dressed ; but Susie preferred her friend of the market-basket.

The little scene had, however, attracted the attention of a tall young man, who walked up to

her, making a most profound bow. Susie instantly thought it must be Mr. Churchill himself; he had such shining black hair, such superb whiskers; and his hand, ornamented with a large seal ring, looked as white as Margaret's. "May I ask who the young lady is inquiring for?" he said, with another flourish, and a signal to some one behind the counter.

"Margaret," the child answered, taught by experience that possibly the whole world might not know who "sister" was; though it seemed strange that the great fact of her life should be unfamiliar here. "Will you tell me where she is, sir?"

"Margaret? Lovely name!" said the young man, in a tone that made Susie feel more uncomfortable still. "There happen to be several young ladies in Philadelphia so fortunate as to be called by it, four or five of 'em here. Suppose you couldn't give any further particulars?"

He stood directly in front of her, and made such elaborate flourishes that she knew very well, apart from the little laugh from behind the counter, that he was only pretending to help her; so she stood for a moment at bay, uncertain whether to dart past him, and run off into the cold and

darkness, or cry where she stood. She began to feel her fatigue now; and the bright lights and confusion of the store were bewildering.

“What’s all this?” some one said, coming up behind her tormentor, who started at the voice.

His very attitude grew respectful as he answered: “Only some poor child, sir, asking for one of the girls.”

“And you were too busy to attend to her, it appears?” said the gentleman, who did not look half so severe as his tone made her expect that he would when she ventured to look up; and that was softened as he spoke to her.

“Who shall I find for you? We will not trouble this *gentleman* any longer.”

“I wanted to see my sister Margaret, sir—Margaret Grant; she sells dresses; she told me to come for her,” said Susie, apologetically.

“Miss Grant?” (Susie ventured another look, and thought he did not seem very much offended at her intrusion.) “This way. If you had come in the Arch Street door, you would have been close by her. But never mind: here she is—looking for you, I dare say.”

Margaret’s thoughts, just at that moment, were

certainly more with her little sister, wandering up and down the dark streets, than the rich brocade she was mechanically showing off to the best advantage. The quick exclamation, "Oh, my darling!" as she caught sight of the child, expressed at once her anxiety and her thankfulness, both of which were so great that she did not notice who had been Susie's guide through the intricacies of shelves and counters; and, when the child had squeezed her hand in speechless delight at being under her sister's protection once more, the gentleman had gone away without waiting to be thanked.

"One moment, Susie; curl yourself up in the corner, dear," was all Margaret had time to say.

"Two and a quarter?" inquired the lady to whom she was showing the silk, impatient of the little interruption.

"Two and a quarter, that is it," said Margaret.

"Don't you think it's rather high?"

"One of our newest importations, ma'am. Mr. Churchill selected it himself, while away; he chooses all our evening dresses."

"Do you think it would be becoming to me?" The lady was one of those who ask everybody's opinion on their dress, from their husband to the

chambermaid, but always end in following their own. She was neither young, nor pretty. Margaret could not help fancying the figure she would be, in a pale rose-colored brocade, intended for a young girl of nineteen, but her honesty had daily and hourly such trials.

“As becoming as any thing else would be,” she thought, but said: “I suppose it is for Mrs. Flag’s ball, we have sold several dresses for it to-day. I believe her rooms are always well-lighted; this silk needs a good light.”

“Yes,” said the lady, forgetting in her curiosity, as to who had purchased dresses for the great ball, and what they were going to wear, that Margaret had evaded her question. “Mrs. John Thompson is one of your customers, isn’t she?”

Not condescending to question openly, Mrs. Flag’s invited guest did not hesitate to put leading questions. Adelaide Long, standing idly by, and covertly ridiculing the dress, manners, and language of the lady to Ellen Boyne, would have launched forth instantly on a flood of welcome gossip. Next to home servants, the clerks in a store like this, know more of society and its affairs, particularly if they are women, who have an instinctive talent for putting this and that together.

At Lowry's, for instance, those plainly-dressed, quiet-looking women, take your measure at a glance, as you walk in at the door. They know whether you are a stranger in town, or only to its fashionable quarter. You might purchase the most costly article in their charge, and it would not alter their opinion of your standing one whit.

If you are a Philadelphian, and do not visit Mrs. Flag, or show any ignorance of such old family names as are to them daily food, they will wait on you attentively, it is true, but with that distant though perfect civility which marks the attentions of a superior. They would not themselves change places with you in the social scale, for they are in daily and familiar intercourse with the people you scarcely know by sight. You cannot help feeling the bow, with which they hand you your change, and resume immediately the conversation or employment which your appearance interrupted. They hold Mrs. Tom Baker, quoted as she is in some circles, as a parvenu, and could detail any step of her rise in society, from the time she moved into Spruce Street, and took a pew in St. Peter's Church, up to the final *coup d'état* by which she accomplished the *entrée* to

Mrs. Flag's receptions, and thus settled the doubtful point of her position triumphantly.

It is by no means a "pursuit of knowledge under difficulties" with them. Mrs. Flag talks to the young gentlemen friends always hanging about her in shopping hours, and specifies any name whose pretensions she intends to wither, and others that shall be graciously permitted to flourish in the light of her countenance. Mrs. Tom Baker follows, and complains to her *claqueur*, little Miss Smith, of the neglect and slights of her late Newport intimates: breaks off in the selection of her gloves to exclaim: "Oh, and about that horrid affair of Augustus Middleton," and gives place to Mrs. Middleton's intimate friend who is fresh from a long recital of the whole affair, and says to *her* companion: "Isn't it distressing? poor Mrs. Middleton looked as if she had not slept a wink all night," (which do you prefer, my dear, plum-color or tan?) "and there must be a divorce, I think."

But it is quite time that we return to the humbler aspirations of Mrs. George Anthony Bond, well known to them also, by her costly purchases, and her endeavors to make them understand that she is perfectly *au fait* to the movements of all

these great people, by continually quoting their dress, or doings. She is not successful, however, for they are as well aware as she is herself, that she once gave music lessons to Mrs. Tom Baker's younger sisters, and taught the Miss Burneys drawing.

Margaret least of any perhaps, in the throng of attendants at Churchill & Choate's, busied herself with these absorbing topics, and therefore it was not simply a stroke of policy with her to suppose that the elegantly dressed lady she served, was a visitor of Mrs. Flag's. Next to receiving an invitation, it was supremely delightful to be supposed entitled to one, and Mrs. Bond immediately decided to have the brocade; though from another point of weakness in her character, a fancy for paying a little less than the price demanded for any article, she did not manifest her intentions at once.

Susie, watching these proceedings from behind the counter, was more particularly interested in the dress and conduct of Miss Ida Frances, who accompanied her mamma. She had never before seen a little girl of her own age so handsomely dressed, except at a distance, in church perhaps;

and Margaret had always taught her that there, it was not right to notice or comment on such things. Miss Ida, tired of settling her pompadour pink bonnet, and ermine tippet, in the great mirror let into the wall behind Margaret, began to think it was high time her wants received some attention. "Mamma, mamma!" she began, twitching her mother's sleeve, "come, I want to know what I'm going to have?"

"Look for yourself, Ida; can't you? Don't bother me!"

The tone was quite as pettish and familiar as the child's. Susie, expecting to hear a sharp reprimand at least, opened her eyes wide, and looked at Margaret to see if she was not equally astonished; but Margaret had seen such "honoring of father and mother" before.

"Show me something pretty," the child said imperiously, to Ellen Boyne, while Addy Long suggested in an undertone that she needed "whipping and putting to bed."

"Oh, how lovely," thought Susie, as a crimson mousseline, with a tiny black figure was opened temptingly upon the counter, "I'm sure she'll take that! Only think that she can choose for

herself; she can't find any thing prettier than that, I guess."

"Not a mousseline!" And the despised fabric was tossed contemptuously aside. "I've got plenty of school-dresses. I want a party dress too."

So she went to parties. What kind of parties could they be where that crimson mousseline was not good enough to wear?

But, while Susie thus commented wonderingly to herself, Mrs. Bond had discovered that Margaret really meant what she said; that two dollars and a quarter a yard was the very least the silk could be had for, directed it to be cut, and turned her attention to Miss Ida, who had chosen a plaid *glacé*, in which the gayest colors were mingled.

"Oh, you extravagant little thing! You'll ruin your father!" And Mrs. Bond upraised her well-gloved hands in a pretty affectation of dismay.

"That's what he says about somebody else, every day," retorted the child, pertly. "It isn't but just half as much as yours."

"Well, only don't tell him what it cost, or mine either. How do you know what I gave? Ann

will have to make it for you. I must save somehow."

"No, Ann shan't. She spoiled my tarleton with the tucks. Ann doesn't know anything. All the girls at our school go to Miss Singer, and I shall, too."

"What are children coming to?" Mrs. Bond said to Margaret, in smiling approval, evidently delighted with her daughter's fashionable predilections, though pretending to disclaim all part or lot in this precious development.

"What, indeed?" thought Margaret, glancing from the bold, over-dressed little puppet to her shy, patient sister in the corner, and wondering what effect the example might have.

Susie watched the miniature woman of fashion to the very door, and then turned to Margaret with an odd little sigh; but Margaret's time and attention were again engaged. She was most grateful to the good-natured Marianne, who came and sat down by her, and to Ellen Boyne, who hunted up some pretty embossed and gilt papers, giving her, besides, an empty glove-box, with a gay picture on the lid, to put them in. They were real treasures to Susie; and she turned them over, and ad-

mired them, trying not to feel tired; but she could not help wishing, every time she thought of the long walk before her, that she should be glad when they were safe home, even with the prospect of Margaret for a companion.

The store was closed at last; and Margaret's cheerful "Come now, Susie" roused the child from the first bewildering drowsiness of approaching sleep.

Tired little feet! lagging wearily behind Margaret's brisk step, quickened by the fresh air after a long day's imprisonment; shivering little figure! wrapping the thin shawl closer and closer as the cold wind swept around the corner, and down the cross streets, in their very faces! weary little head! beginning to wonder already over the great social problem of rich and poor. Struggle on a little longer with the strange numbing apathy creeping on! Very still and straight those failing limbs may lie ere long.

The gleaming light of the apothecary's window on the corner streamed out with strange, ghastly tints over the icy pavement—that well-known landmark never so joyfully hailed as now.

"I do hope the boys will be in bed, sister;

don't you?" And the great shivering sigh that could not be kept back any longer told, more plainly than any complaining, *why* she hoped so.

"Are you so very tired? poor little Susie! Why didn't you tell me so, dear, at the Exchange? and we could have taken an omnibus."

"I heard you tell the good-natured girl that you didn't have any money when she asked you to lend her some; and I didn't like to, sister."

Margaret's heart smote her with thoughtlessness, selfishness it seemed; she had been so glad of the exercise, and was so warmly wrapped up in the heavy blanket shawl. Susie's side, too!

"Does your side ache badly?" and she put her arm around the frail little figure, and almost carried her along.

Susie leaned heavily upon the welcome support.

"A little bit; but we are almost home now; ain't we? Won't the fire feel good?"

The hope of finding quiet and rest, as well as warmth, was vain. The boys were not in bed, and evidently had been celebrating that juvenile carnival known as "turning the house upside down," Mrs. Grant having been too busy to care what happened in the unusual exertion of ironing, and

amusing her baby at the same time. The chairs were in the middle of the floor, harnessed for an omnibus by innumerable twists and knottings of the clothes-line, with a rocking-chair for a leader. This spirited team had been for some time deserted; and Al was walking about in his father's apparel, the boots up to his knees, and the tails of the coat sweeping the floor, the only drawback on his enjoyment being that the hat would fall over his eyes at every step. Washington, following after, and teasing him to play "Indian," a favorite pastime with him, since he could make more noise "whooping" than in any other way, pounced upon Susie the instant she appeared.

"Shan't Susie play Injun with me? Say, ma!" shouted the young tyrant, as she shook him off with a faint "Oh, don't, Al! Do let me be!"

Margaret had hurried up stairs, seeing the lowering look which greeted their entrance, that she might be ready to give Susie the help and comfort she stood in need of.

Susie coveted only to sit quietly down behind the warm stove, and looked around in dismay. She wondered what made her feel so dizzy, as the red heat of the ironing fire flashed into her face.

The spoiled child's appeal was made at an unfortunate moment. Mrs. Grant, tired and angry, fretted by the noise and the worry of the baby, was even less placable than usual. She was going for a hot iron as the boy tugged at the skirt of her dress, and shouted again: "Say, ma! shan't Susie play Injun with me?"

The tired child saw the angry look, the upraised hand with which Mrs. Grant came towards her; but she had not strength to get out of her way, scarcely to shrink from her.

"Good-for-nothing, lazy little piece!" And then came a blow on the ear that made the whole room reel, and took her breath away.

That strange, blind, suffocating feeling! Susie thought it must be dying, and almost hoped it was. The light, the stove, the children, swam before her eyes as she fell to the floor, her head striking against the table; and then all was darkness—no pain, no outcry as she lay at the angry woman's feet.

Presently, she was conscious of lying in Margaret's lap, and thought she heard her sister saying, as if she had been far off, "You have killed her at last!" and the boys crying with fright, but all so far away. She could not open her eyes, or move,

or speak ; and she thought perhaps this was *being* dead, as her father and Margaret lifted her, and carried her up stairs to the bed. She felt drops of water falling on her forehead—or was it Margaret's tears?—felt them slowly trickle down her cheek ; and then she seemed to sleep, and forget every thing again.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. GRANT, whose conscience was soothed by a good night's rest, called the child as usual when daylight came. Margaret had watched with sleepless love and sorrow over the wan face, flushed into fever by midnight, and changing in restless, torturous dreams. She knew that the faintness was only a token of some deep-seated malady threatening her sister. "She can't get up. Please don't wake her," she said, as Mrs. Grant, muttering something about "knowing the reason of all these airs," appeared in her early morning *deshabille*.

Susie, startled by their voices, started from her pillow, and tried to spring out of bed; but the movement awakened a piercing, agonizing pain; and Margaret, made determined by her fears, dressed hurriedly, and went herself for a physician.

"I don't see how *I'm* to blame," said Mrs. Grant to her husband, later in the day.

Susie had fallen asleep again, with the application of a blister to her side; and Margaret, unwilling to leave her, had felt compelled to go, nevertheless.

“Because Margaret chose to drag her off to that store, cold as it was, and I happened to box her ears for being so cross, just as the stove made her sick! How should I know she was going to faint away?”

“But the doctor says it must have been coming on some time,” returned her husband, roused from his usual apathy by Susie’s suffering and danger. “He says she must have strained her side somehow. I always thought Leander was too heavy for her.”

“See here, now! leave me tell you, once for all; I ain’t goin’ to be found fault with any longer. It’s new capers for you, anyhow; and it’s bad enough to have that child sick up stairs, and every stitch to do myself, and her to wait on into the bargain.”

Mrs. Grant’s voice began to break into the complaining whimper which her husband dreaded more than its higher key, because from this there was no appeal.

“ Well, Jane, I was only going to say”—he began, more humbly :

“ I don't see what right you have to say *anything*, you, of all people. Wasn't I making money at a good trade when I married you ? and didn't you bring me here to do nothing but slave, and be put upon, and rode over by that high-strung daughter of yours ? And here I work, and work, and work from morning till night, and no thanks from nobody ; while you're idling round, and taking the very bread out of my mouth with them ridiculous patterns and machines of your'n.”

Mrs. Grant's feelings entirely overcame her ; and she set down the flat-iron she was using, on the pound weight which did duty as a stand, and herself in a Boston rocking-chair.

Mr. Grant scorned to defend his beloved pursuits to one so utterly without comprehension of them, and forbore to attempt consolation, in the fear of making a bad matter worse.

“ If there's anything I hate,” continued his wife, in the same miserable tone, and rocking violently, the more effectually to compose her excited feelings, “ it's a sick person in the house. It makes me so low-spirited ; and, though that child don't

earn her salt, nor never did, every step counts, I tell you; though there's no use of telling you. Men never realize such things. No; I guess they don't. *They* wouldn't care if a woman worked and worked till she dropped, so long as *they* was made comfortable. If I'd only knowed how things was goin', I never would have got myself into the scrape, you may depend! and I earning my three and four dollars a week, and wearing my silks and satins! I haven't had the first thing like other folks since I came into this house; and you know it; and now you undertake to blame me."

So ended Mr. Grant's first and last attempt to interfere in Susie's behalf; and it was through such scenes as this, of almost daily occurrence, that Margaret, with her love of all that was gentle and refined, had come almost to hate her home. True to her first resolves, she seldom suffered herself to be drawn into contending with her step-mother; nor had she the vulgar prejudice which holds all who bear that much abused title, monsters of neglect and cruelty. Mrs. Grant, in any other situation, would have been just what nature and association had made her, a selfish, coarse, uneducated person, who had no other idea of influence

than wheedling or complaining, and could not understand Margaret's patient forbearance of word and deed in any other light than pride and determined obstinacy. It was a misfortune that the two natures had ever come in contact, unless, indeed, the attrition had been needed to heighten the sterling gold of the young girl's character and disposition.

Susie's illness was pronounced pleurisy, needing great care; though if the violence of the first attack was subdued, there would be no immediate danger. This was said before her, though Margaret tried to prevent any expression of the doctor's opinion until they were down stairs again. She knew the nervous excitability of his patient, and understood, if he did not, why the fever remained unchecked at the end of the third day.

"Oh, sister, if you could only stay with me!" Susie said, the instant he was out of hearing. "Medicine won't do any good. It's so lonesome! and my head aches so, counting the window-panes, and the knobs on the bureau-drawers, and the cracks in the wall, over, and over, and over again! I try not to; and I say the multiplication-table, and 'The House that Jack built,' and all sorts of

things, backwards and forwards, and hold my eyes down. But I can't go to sleep. They fly right up ; and I begin again."

"I know it is hard," said Margaret, trying to smooth out the tangles of her soft, fair hair, matted with tossing from side to side all day.

"The pillow gets so hot, and the bed so hard, before night comes ! and the clothes slip down on the floor, and my head aches as though it would burst."

"Do I hurt your head now, dear ?"

Margaret could scarcely keep her voice from trembling. It was such a miserable picture, the child's long, lonely day ; and yet she did not see how it could be otherwise.

"Oh no, sister ! Nothing you do ever hurts me, not even dressing my blister. Your hand is so cool and nice, it makes my head better. What made the doctor ask you how mother died, and if I was like her, to-night ?"

"Did you hear him ?" asked Margaret, startled, for she did not think Susie would understand the doctor's opinion, that the constitutional delicacy she inherited was the worst feature of the case.

"I can't help hearing *everything*, Maggie. It

seems as if I could hear twice as well as before I was sick. Every sound goes through and through my head; and Al and Washington have had to stay in these rainy days; and then I can hear father and mother talk when he comes in; and she says such ugly things about you, it makes me feel so wicked!"

"Never mind me." Margaret checked Susie quickly. She knew it would do her no good to listen to Mrs. Grant's opinion of her, much as she desired to distract Susie's thoughts from herself. "I'll ask mother if she can't keep the boys a little quieter; shall I? and maybe father will stay at home again, and work, as soon as he has seen all those gentlemen. That will be a great deal of company for you."

"Oh, I don't care about the boys so much, except when I am trying to go to sleep! but I do wish she wouldn't sit right down by the stairs, and talk to old Mrs. Devine about that woman that died. Mrs. Devine has been in every day; and they talk and talk about sick people, and dead people, and laying them out—I believe Mrs. Devine likes to—and how they look after it. Oh, I can't bear!—" And Susie's slight frame quiv-

ered as she buried her face in the pillow to shut out some terrible sight.

“There! there, darling!” said Margaret, soothingly; “there’s nothing dreadful about the dead. Don’t you remember that, when you were a little thing, you used to like me to tell you about our mother in her white dress, and her hands folded, as if she was praying for father and us? and the white roses, Susie, that Ruth brought and put by them? and how her mouth seemed to smile the very last time we looked at her?”

“But then I went to a funeral, you know, sister,” said Susie, starting up again, “when Anne Lyons died. She looked so hollow and dreadful in the coffin; and everybody that was there, whether they knew her or not, came and looked at her, and said just what they pleased about her. I couldn’t bear to think people were going to look at me so, Maggie.”

“They never should; but you’re not going to die now, dear.”

“I think I am, though, almost all the time, or the doctor would not talk about mother. And I’ll tell you what’s the very worst thing of all. When it getsd arker and darker up here, and it isn’t time

for you yet, and the boys go to bed, it's so dreadfully still down stairs, and in the front room, and everywhere; then I get so frightened; and I think what if I should die, and they let old Mrs. Devine come and lay me out! and then she should talk about me to other people so, and say whether I looked natural or not!"

"Don't! hush, Susie! please don't!" said Margaret, crying silently in spite of herself.

"But I can't help it, Maggie. I try, and try, and hide my head under the bed-clothes; and then I imagine that I am buried; and I have such a dreadful, suffocating feeling; and it seems as if you never *would come*. Oh, dear! dear!" And the child, fairly beside herself with recounting the terrors of darkness, flung her arms about wildly, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"You must not! indeed you must not, sister! You are making yourself a great deal worse," said Margaret, taking Susie's hands in her own, and stroking them caressingly. Every word had pierced her own heart, for, though she could not blame Mrs. Grant, borne down by household cares, and fretted by her father's inefficiency, she could not but think how different it would have been were

her own mother living—she who accomplished so much so noiselessly, who upheld her father, and never upbraided him—the gentlest and tenderest of nurses. She remembered her own childish sickness, and how she had been rocked in her mother's arms, and soothed in pain—which was nothing to that which Susie bore so patiently—as only a mother can soothe, with soft kisses on her forehead, and, best of all, those low, old-fashioned hymns.

“ Shall I sing for you, Susie, when I make the clothes all straight and comfortable? Mother used to sing to me when I was sick; and I remember how it used to put me to sleep when nothing else did. I wouldn't think any thing more about these things to-night: and to-morrow I'll try and see if Ruth can't come and sit with you awhile. Shall I?”

But Susie only sobbed the faster; and Margaret, still brushing back the hair from the child's forehead, drew her head from the weary pillow to her bosom, and sang the dear old cradle hymns, as if she were hushing a baby to sleep.

The tears lay still, after a time, on the burning cheeks; the grieving, quivering sighs came at longer intervals; and Susie was comforted.

But for Margaret there was no rest that night. She had to struggle with rebellious thoughts: "Why should that innocent child suffer so much? Why must she be so helpless to relieve her?"—still shrinking from the trial of her faith, and thinking, as all do who question our Father's wiser choices, that she could bear any other trouble better than the one he had sent to chasten her, forgetting, as we all do, until the proud will, bending, suffers the Comforter to call to remembrance, that the sorrow *is* from Him who doth not grieve willingly. Vague wishes and plans floated in feverish confusion through her mind; and the consciousness of the child's lonely suffering never left her, even in snatches of restless sleep. She was thankful for the first sickly dawn of day. The darkness had to her, as well as Susie, phantoms of its own.

The heavy head of the little sleeper turned wakefully upon her pillow.

"Better this morning, I'm sure," her loving nurse said, as cheerfully as she could. "Your head is cooler; and you slept more quietly than you have done since you were sick."

"It must have been because you sang to me, then," said Susie, gratefully. "Stoop down, and

let me kiss you. Oh, I do love you so much! Why, you're all dressed? Have I slept so late? But your eyes look tired."

"Do they? I must be getting old—that's it—and you see the wrinkles. See how much better I shall look when I've brushed my hair. It wasn't done very smoothly; was it?"

She did not care that Susie should know she had not laid off her clothes at all.

"I think you have such beautiful hair, sister."

This opinion was no sisterly weakness. Everybody thought Margaret had beautiful hair. Perhaps she thought so herself, for she was more careful of its arrangement than of any part of her toilet. Now it rippled and brightened in the early sunlight, as she loosened the braids from their unwonted confinement, like Godiva's own tresses; and Susie, who had never heard of that lovely lady, "clothed on with purity," looked on from the bed admiringly.

"How vain I should be if I believed all you say!"

Margaret's voice had a playfulness she was far from feeling; but she was glad to see Susie diverted, if only for an instant.

“ Oh dear, what a long day it's going to be ! ” was the next ejaculation. The shadow came over the brightened face, and over Margaret's path again. “ But I didn't mean to say it. I don't want you to be worried ; I don't mean to complain ; only it seems to make me feel better sometimes.”

“ I know just how it is, dear, and how hard it is to lie here all by yourself ; but I'm going for Ruth, recollect.”

Margaret did not dare to promise any thing more, and hurried away on her errand before any of the household were stirring.

CHAPTER VII.

RUTH was up, and her room in perfect order, the comfortable rag-carpet without a shred from yesterday's work, the sun streaming over the plants, and sending a glow of deeper crimson to the heart of a half-open rose; the kettle sang cheerily; and the little round, slender-legged table set with all precision and inviting cleanliness. The equally tidy mistress of the little apartment turned with a start from slicing a loaf of fresh home-made bread.

“Dear me, Margaret! What's happened? You look as if you had a fit of sickness. Sit down! sit down!” And she drew a chair between the table and the fire. “Why, how blue you are!” She ran on without waiting for the answer, which would not have been given in a very steady voice. “You almost look as if you'd been crying. What's

become of you all the last week? I haven't even seen Susie; and she generally gives me a call, since—let me see! Why, it's more than a week, isn't it, since she was around?"

Margaret explained as briefly as she could their present domestic troubles, and especially Susie's chief need; while the little dame, bustling about to set the tea to draw, "oh-deared" and "so-soed" in kindly sympathy.

"To be sure I'll go, and stay with her as much as I can; but my work's right here all the time; and 't isn't as if I could take it with me handy. I don't mind your mother. You needn't be the least bit afraid of that. She knows enough to let *me* alone. But I can't do much good, half an hour or so a day. Isn't there anybody you can get to stay right along, Margaret? That child oughtn't to be left all alone, particularly if she's taken such notions. Where's your father? Throws her right back; of course it does!"

Margaret shook her head.

"I can't think of anybody. Father? He's out almost all the time about his patent."

"Well, well! I'll see what I can do. You

just sit down, now, and take this slice of toast and a cup of tea. That's what *you* need. I don't believe you've touched a mouthful to-day."

"I can't eat, Ruth. It would choke me."

"Jest so. I know all about it. But what are you going to tend store and take care of Susan on? *You'll* be laid up next!"

Margaret broke off a corner of toast, and drank a cup of tea. She knew as well as Ruth how much she needed it; but she was late, much later than usual. She could not stay, even to be comforted and petted. Hurrying into the street, with Mrs. Norton's kindly "Now do take care of yourself" sounding behind her, a sudden thought of asking leave of absence for herself darted into her mind. What was money, though every dollar was usually appropriated before it was received, to her sister's life? She knew that it depended far more on nursing than medicine; and she suddenly felt what a terrible blank there would be without this motive for exertion. She prayed, as she walked rapidly along, that the cup might not be pressed to her lips; and she tried to utter all of that agonized petition; but, "nevertheless, not my will," she knew, did not come from her heart.

If she could have seen Mr. Choate when she first entered the store, it would have been comparatively easy to ask the permission to absent herself; but he was unusually engaged; and the day opened with such a press of customers, that Margaret began to feel she could not be spared just at the opening of the holiday season. Then she thought of her salary again. Four dollars gone! and Susie must certainly have a cloak, or a new warm shawl, as soon as she could go out again; and there would be the doctor's bill, and the medicines from the apothecary's, with many more little expenses which come to so much in the end, all growing out of this sickness.

"Let me see; the difference is scarcely worth mentioning," said the customer she was engaged with, when Mr. Choate reappeared at last, and resumed his pen with a zest sharpened by the hum of business around him. The lady was hesitating between two dresses that she held up alternately to the light. "Really, I like *this* so much the best! What will the whole difference be?"

"Four dollars and a half in the dress," said Margaret, patiently. She had made the calculation long before. The indecision had lasted at least

half an hour; and the counter was heaped with many other styles.

“Time does not seem of the least consequence to most people,” thought Margaret, “or money either, for that matter. I wonder if rich people dream how we covet what they waste of both.” The remembrance of Susie, wearily tossing all alone through that half hour, came to her with a pang. “Sickness is nothing to the rich. It can’t be half as much as it is to us, with all the care and anxiety it brings to poor people. I don’t suppose it ever comes into their minds what a blessing it is to be able to take care of those they love, and never have to leave them when they are suffering.”

It certainly did not come into Margaret’s,—for we see only one side of the picture at a time,—how much these cares distract from the dull wearing anxiety of those who sit by, powerless to aid, yet having nothing to call their thoughts from the suffering they witness! or, sadder still, how many are left to the care of a hireling, because that care can be purchased, with the ready excuse of “health and spirits suffering from such close confinement!” Better the humble, self-sacrificing ministry of the poor, one to another, even though some necessities

are hardly gained, and some comforts altogether wanting.

Margaret took the twenty dollar bill at last tendered to her, and went with it to the desk herself. She felt a restless impatience to have the matter decided. The request and the money were proffered. The change and the *refusal* came together.

Mr. Choate expressed himself "*surprised* that Miss Grant should ask leave then, of all times in the year. Miss Grant must see for herself"—and the gray eyes swept a glance at the arriving and departing throng with peculiar satisfaction—"that they had need of all their assistance, especially with Christmas week at hand. Three levies and a fip." And Margaret felt herself and her petition dismissed, as he pushed the silver towards her. His manner, always decided, was so especially cold and uncomfortable that it brought back to her mind the affair of the missing dress, which, though an ever-present burden, her more recent troubles had pressed into the background. The lady was waiting for the change. It was no time for explanation or expostulations. She stood like a hunted creature at bay, in the accumulated pressure and

uncertainty. For a moment, she felt as if she would dare any thing, and apply to Mr. Churchill, whose kind face at a little distance she fancied was turned towards the desk as she spoke ; but that would have been a capital offence in the eyes of his senior, who prided himself on being a rigid disciplinarian, and on his absolute rule in all minor transactions.

There was a lull in the business of that special department just then, and the girls drew together in little groups, to talk over the items of news dispensed at their several counters.

“What in the world is the matter with Margaret Grant?” asked Susie’s friend Marianne, as they watched her coming back from the desk. “I believe she’s in love ; I vow I’ll ask her.”

“In disgrace more like !” retorted Addy Long, with a shrug of her half-covered shoulders. “Caleb looks as cross as a thunder-cloud.”

“Something’s going on ; that’s certain,” said another of the girls. “There’s Mr. Churchill walking up, and now they’re both looking after her. Margaret hasn’t been like herself since that day she was sent for into the office. Don’t you know ?”

“What day ?—no !” And Addy Long’s color

rose a shade higher, as she spoke with a little start. "What was it about? did you ask her?"

"Why, don't you remember? I told somebody when the girls came in, and I thought it was you. Ask her! no, indeed! Margaret isn't a girl to question about her own affairs. How plain she always does dress! I wonder what she does with her money!"

"She's too mean to spend it!"

"Oh, for shame, Addy!" said two of the girls at once.

"I don't think *you* ought to take her part, Marianne. I heard her refuse to lend you a dollar the night that little sister of hers was here, after you'd been amusing the child, too!"

"That's nothing! Margaret knows I'm always in debt to everybody. She doesn't think it's right for any of us to borrow or lend."

"Mean, I told you so," said the other provokingly. "She was afraid she should never see it again."

Ellen Boyne came to Marianne's aid. "I don't think she's mean exactly; but I know, if I had a father's house as she has, and no board to pay, I suppose, I'd have something better than such a dress as

she wears, year in and year out, when we can get things at cost, too. But do look, girls! there goes Mr. Churchill."

True enough, there was Mr. Churchill speaking to Margaret, who remained alone at her post.

Addy Long's uneasiness visibly increased. She would have given her month's salary, though she owed it all, to have been two yards nearer; but Mr. Churchill spoke very low, and they could not make out a word, though Margaret's color went and came as she listened.

"Mr. Choate tells me that you wish to be absent a week; on account of sickness in the family." Always that same kind, low voice. It quieted her of itself.

"I have succeeded in showing him that we can spare you for a week, at least, and I hope by that time your father will be better."

"It is my sister, and I am *very* much needed," said Margaret, with a glad, grateful look of thanks for such unexpected succor.

"Perhaps, then, you had better go at once. One afternoon will not make much difference here, and there are half-a-dozen idle girls."

Margaret was only too glad to accept the ad-

ditional kindness. She thought of the difference between the two members of the firm, as she found Mr. Churchill standing by the street door when she was ready to go. He opened it for her, and bowed as if she had been the most wealthy and fashionable woman in the city, though without speaking. Mr. Choate would not even have seen her. Perhaps Margaret thought more than this, as she called to mind other instances of Mr. Churchill's invariable kindness and courtesy, contrasting it insensibly with the extraordinary airs and graces of Mr. Wood, one of the clerks, who had lately distinguished her by several pointed compliments and attentions. Yet by half the world he would have been considered a much more attractive man than his employer.

Mrs. Grant looked up in astonishment at Margaret's unexpected appearance, but she happened to be in a resentful mood, and disdained to ask any questions, though burning with curiosity. Margaret had half a mind to be equally uncommunicative, but, though longing to fly up-stairs, she checked the rising ungraciousness, and made the needful explanations.

She need not have hurried them so. Susie was

asleep, though even then, her yearning loneliness made itself apparent. She had rolled up the shawl, spread over her for additional warmth, into the uncouth semblance of a huge rag doll, which was laid on the pillow beside her; and over it one arm was thrown affectionately, thus cheating herself into slumber, with the fancy of companionship. Seeing her thus, in the broad glare of noonday for the first time since her illness, Margaret was startled at the change a few days had made. So slight, so wan, so wasted! her sister almost felt for a moment that she had come but to see her die. Carefully as she moved, the slight sound awoke the sleeper.

“*Oh, Margaret!*” There was such unmistakable joy and relief in the recognition, and in those unnaturally large eyes that seemed to question whether it was not a dream after all.

“It’s really I, Susie! and I’ve come to make you a nice long visit. Can’t you ask me to take off my things. See what I’ve brought you, too.”

“Oranges? Oh, I *did* want an orange so much. I thought about it all day yesterday, and when I woke in the night, I was so thirsty! But father roasted me an apple this morning. Wasn’t

he good, sister? he roasted it himself, before he went away, and brought it up to me on the china plate I used to have when I was a little girl. Wasn't he good? it did taste so nice!"

Margaret was touched by this unlooked-for thoughtfulness on her father's part. It was more like his old self than any thing she had seen for many a day.

"But you must not talk so much, Susie. You must only look at me, and be as still as that young friend of yours there on the bed."

Both the sisters laughed, Susie a little ashamed at her own invention. "But I was so lonesome," she said; "and it was really a great deal better than nothing."

The afternoon was a very pleasant one, save the pain that even Margaret's presence could not entirely banish. She did much to alleviate it, however, and had full time to make the room as comfortable as circumstances would allow; and Ruth, coming in just at the right moment, constructed an impromptu easy-chair with quilts and pillows, where Susie nestled while she aired the bed thoroughly, and made it up soft and evenly,

as only those can who were taught bed-making as an accomplishment in the olden time.

Ruth's next prescription was not so cheerfully followed. She declared that "all those tangles only made the fever worse, and would have the child cross-eyed by the time she was well, any way." They must be cut off at once. Susie looked ruefully at the "snarls," as Ruth called them, as the scissors of her old friend clipped away about her ears; and Margaret was glad that the duty did not devolve on her. How well could she remember seeing their mother twining the short, silky rings over her thin fingers, as the baby lay in her bosom! and, when Ruth said, briskly, "There, now! that looks something like!" Margaret could not enter very heartily into compliments on the improvement she had effected. It was a trifling loss, though, when there was so much gained, for there was a rapid decrease of fever from that hour, whether the result of the doctor's visits, or Ruth's, or Margaret's nursing. Gaining strength was another thing, though; and, if the illness was less alarming, the little patient needed still more care and soothing than before.

A whole week to herself and Susie! Such an

event had not chanced since Margaret's first entrance into a busy life. How much she could accomplish on their hurriedly repaired wardrobe and, fortunately, she had provided herself with requisite materials long before, in anticipation of leisure that never seemed to come. But Mrs. Grant's jaded, fretful face would come between her and the satisfaction with which she looked forward to this needed interval. Why should it? There were no good turns to be requited, no kind feelings to reciprocate. Was not her time as truly her own as it had been Mr. Churchill's who had given it to her? It was not given, after all. She would have to pay herself for the lost salary. It was doubly her own, then. If the children had been lovable, it would have been easier to deny her own plans, and work for them. And here, for the first time, Margaret saw that she had suffered herself to set aside her duty. Why were they not more lovable? She had made faint efforts to attach them to her, to train them into more gentle, thoughtful ways, and had been rewarded by Mrs. Grant's jealous warnings "not to interfere with *her* children, and try to manage them as she did all the rest of the house." But they were her father's

children as well as her brothers; and was it right to turn from them so entirely as she had done of late? Perhaps Susie would yet be taken away to teach her that she had wronged them for her sake. Must she wait to have the cross laid upon her? Was there not a divine command to "take it up," and bear it patiently?

Margaret thought over all these things as she tried to fix her mind on a well-worn volume of prayers and meditations, which had been endeared to her as her mother's daily companion, as well as by the help and counsel it had many a time given in her need. It was no other than the "Imitation" of the devout Thomas à Kempis, he who, being dead, yet speaketh hopefully and consolingly to many a troubled spirit. Her mother's pencil had marked the page to which she opened, and Margaret read:—

"Those things that a man cannot amend in himself or others, he ought to suffer patiently *until God order things otherwise.*

"Think that perhaps it is better so for thy trial and patience.

"Thou oughtest to pray, notwithstanding, when thou hast such impediments, that God would vouch-

safe to help thee, and that thou mayest bear them kindly.

“Thou must learn to break thine own will in many things, if thou wilt have peace and concord with others.

“God hath thus ordered it, that we may learn to bear one another's burdens, for no man is without fault—no man but hath his burden—no man is sufficient of himself—no man wise enough of himself; but we ought to bear with one another, comfort and help one another.”

“My proud will! that is it!” thought Margaret, as she closed the book; and she felt that she had been helped to conquer it for once, at least, as she sat in the cold chamber by Susie's side, that evening, sewing as busily on a half-finished jacket for one of the boys as if it had been the new dress she had promised her sister so long before.

The concession was not lost, for Mrs. Grant came up voluntarily, and sat down awhile on the foot of the bed, for the first time since Susie's sickness; and Margaret felt more than the glow of duty conquering self-will as she saw the pleasure this little token of interest gave the long-neglected child.

CHAPTER VIII.

“WHAT an opening and shutting of doors the boys do keep up!” said Margaret, one evening, almost at the close of her precious week.

“Yes, indeed; but not half so bad as they do sometimes. I thought I heard somebody knock, though, now.”

“I guess not. Your little ears are getting altogether too sharp, lately.”

“Well, I thought so; but I don’t know anybody that could come in to see us in the evening; do you?” Susie looked very happy and comfortable among her pillows, though not strong enough to sit up as yet. “Don’t you wish the boys would go to bed? and then we should be just as still as mice.”

“It’s high time; but I suppose mother is busy. I remember, now, I heard her say there was bread to mix. I wonder if I ought to volunteer?”

While Susie was trying to say "I suppose so," cheerfully, Master Washington came lumbering up the stairs, and sat down deliberately on the top-most one, swinging his feet up on to the floor before he delivered his message.

"Mother says you must come right down, Margaret."

Susie's ire rose at the positive summons. It was all very well for Margaret to offer her assistance; but she did not approve of having it demanded. "What for?" she asked, rather sharply, as Margaret began to put her work aside.

"There's a man wants to see her. Me and Al went to the door."

"A man?" And Margaret dropped her spool and scissors, as she rose hastily. "A gentleman? Who is it?"

"Do' know," said the youngster, gravely. "He's got a cane." And then, as if a sudden plan had seized him with this recollection, he began sliding downwards as fast as possible.

"Stop a minute," said Margaret, unaccountably fluttered by such an unusual occurrence. "Can't you tell me what he looks like?"

"Jest like a man. I'm goin' to ride on his .

cane, too ; see if I don't !” And the unsatisfactory messenger put himself beyond the reach of further questioning.

Margaret could think of but one person in the world, of course the most unlikely one to seek her in her own house. Nevertheless, she stopped to smooth her hair, and rearrange her black silk apron. She charged herself with folly as she did so ; but, nevertheless, her heart beat fast, and her cheek flushed. She wondered how it looked down stairs, whether the tea things were washed, and the baby's clothes gathered up and put away. She wished she had thought to offer her assistance a little earlier, and the boys would have been out of the way besides. For the first time in her life, she wished they could afford to have a fire occasionally in the little narrow, unused front room.

After all this flutter of expectation, Mr. Wood, her distinguished-looking fellow-clerk, rose to meet her, with one of his most overwhelming bows, and evidently “got up” elaborately for the occasion. His hair and whiskers were redolent of Roussel's last compound ; his boots shone with an equal gloss. A snow-white handkerchief just peeped from the breast-pocket of his overcoat ; and he

wore, as he always did when "on parade," lemon-colored kid-gloves, that gave the impression that his hand must have been melted, and run into them, from their exact fit. So distinguishing a trait was the last, that Ellen Boyne, famous for *sobriquets*, had knighted him as "Count Lemon," much to his annoyance. Yet there was not a girl of her set but was delighted to exhibit herself beside him, in Walnut Street, on Sunday afternoon.

Margaret's worst fears, as regarded *les enfans terribles*, were confirmed. They were in loud dispute over the possession of the taper walking-stick Mr. Wood had unguardedly laid aside with his hat; and, though he endeavored to appear several shades more elegant than usual, it was plain that his mind was distracted by its threatened demolition between them.

"I got it first!" shouted Al, holding firmly by the ornamental head, a delicately wrought hand in bronze. It might have been moulded after Mr. Wood's own.

"I don't care; I meant to have it up-stairs; didn't I? Didn't I say I was coming right down to ride on it?"

Mr. Wood endeavored to compose himself.

“He had taken the liberty,” he said (“done her the honor” was expressed by his manner), “of calling to see where Miss Grant had secluded herself so long. She could have no idea what a wide chasm her absence had made to every one, her humble servant included.”

Mrs. Grant, listening intently, nodded her head to her husband, as much as to say, “Did you hear that? I told you so,” and administered a slap at random between the disputants, whose movements disturbed her only so far as they made the visitor’s elegant accents rather indistinct.

Disappointment and annoyance combined to make Margaret’s manner even colder than she intended, as she seized the first pause to introduce her guest to her father and mother.

Mr. Wood scarcely condescended to acknowledge a ceremony so useless, so far as he was concerned. As Margaret seated herself, he turned his chair directly back to Mrs. Grant’s, and continued his complimentary discourse.

Washington, having become the victor, by the undignified stratagem of a pinch and a trip mounted his charger in triumph, and careered around the room, adding discord to disorder.

“What did Miss Grant do with herself on Sundays?” was the next insinuating inquiry.

“Never had the pleasure of meeting her, though usually favored by a bow from most of the other young ladies. Very nice set of girls, ours, particularly Miss Long. Did Miss Grant visit Miss Long? She lived in such a *remarkably genteel neighborhood.*”

Margaret understood perfectly well this indirect allusion to the obscurity of her own residence, as well as the furtive glances sent about the room over the top of his hat, which he had thought best to repossess himself of. As to his appearance under her father's roof, and his conversation generally, he expected her to be overwhelmed—she was, with vexation. Though she did not in her heart respect Mr. Wood's opinion, it was very mortifying to be obliged to receive her first gentleman visitor with such surroundings, to say nothing of the unmannerly urchins, who filled up the pauses, and interrupted the flow of his remarks by incessant clamor.

The baby's clothes still lay as he had kicked them off; the bread-trough, covered by the ironing-blanket, stood in front of the stove; not a chair

was in its place; and her father, in whom her family pride centred, looked unusually shabby with his unshaven chin and worst suit of clothes, as he stooped over one of his innumerable diagrams, drawing by the light of a simple oil lamp. How could she feel otherwise than chagrined, knowing that the whole scene would probably be reported with embellishments for the amusement of her companions, Addy Long especially?

No one is quite invulnerable to the opinions of others; and perhaps we care most when we expect judgment by a false standard.

Mr. Grant laid down his papers with something of his old good-breeding in his manner, very different from his wife's. She openly resented their visitor's incivility when—notwithstanding Mr. Grant's movement—he continued to direct his conversation exclusively to Margaret, and commenced talking to her husband, in a very loud tone, on various household topics, calculated to interest no one but themselves.

“Did Miss Grant ever visit the theatre?” resumed Mr. Wood, after a break in his narrative of what had “been going on” in Arch Street during her absence.

“No? Was it possible! He should be delighted to escort her some evening, or to the opera. The season opened in the holidays, as she was probably aware, with an excellent troupe. And there were the concerts; the Philharmonic was extremely fashionable; everybody went to the Philharmonic; Miss Long had sometimes given him the pleasure of her society there. But perhaps Miss Grant did not care for music.”

On the contrary, she was very fond of it; and Mr. Wood felt that he had achieved a triumph when she was forced to acknowledge that she had not heard one of the distinguished artists whose names he so flowingly rehearsed.

Mr. Wood was at once original and consoling, as he responded, “Better late than never.” He might apply it to his call on Miss Grant, though he had frequently promised himself the pleasure. *Snap!* went the treacherous reed on which Mr. Wood (figuratively) leaned. Washington, having resigned it to his brother, was hanging about and eyeing suspiciously the trinkets suspended to the resplendent watch-chain displayed on Mr. Wood’s satin vest; and Al, left to himself, had been occupied in testing its strength by placing it between

two chairs, and riding up and down, delighted with the "spring."

Mr. Wood declared that it was not of the least consequence, in reply to Margaret's distressed apology; but his face expressed a strong desire to try the "spring" of the remainder on the shoulders of the offender, and, perhaps for fear of further damage to his person or possessions, soon after rose to go. "He was sorry to be obliged to tear himself away so soon, but a pressing engagement made it unavoidable. Was there any thing he could do for Miss Grant in her much-to-be-regretted retirement! She must not hesitate to command him."

He evidently anticipated that she would accompany him to the door, and showed his disappointment when Mr. Grant took up the lamp to guide him through the narrow, unlighted hall. The departure was worthy of the advent. Margaret was to feel herself extremely flattered by the warmth of his adieus to herself; but he stalked past Mrs. Grant without notice, and did not even vouchsafe a civil good-night to her father, who patiently held the lamp aloft in the passage.

"Well, Margaret, so you've got a beau at last,"

said Mrs. Grant, before he was fairly out of hearing. "It's high time. *Hush* your racket, and be off to bed this minute!"—the order being addressed to the boys; and Margaret could but think that it would have been just as well if it had been given and enforced a little earlier in the evening.

"Wa'n't them gold things to his chain splendid?" commented Washington, as his mother seized him by the collar of his jacket to facilitate his movements. "I mean to have 'em next time."

"I don't think much of his manners, though," pursued Mrs. Grant. "He might have run his head against the wall, for all me, if *I'd* been your father, before I'd 'a' shown him out."

Margaret went back to Susie more depressed than she had been since her week at home commenced. A vague feeling that something uncomfortable had happened, and was still to grow out of this visit, hung over her. Susie was half sitting up in bed, awaiting her eagerly.

"How long he did stay! Was it Mr. Churchill, sister?"

What had put that into the child's mind? She could not have read Margaret's fluttering thoughts as she left the room.

“ Mr. Churchill ? No, indeed, Susie ! What would he come here for ? ”

“ Oh, I don't know ! I'm so glad ! ” And she fell back on her pillows contentedly.

“ Why ? ” asked Margaret, still more surprised. “ Glad of what ? ”

“ Because I knew the voice right away ; and it was the man who teased me so at the store, and laughed at me. I shouldn't like it to be Mr. Churchill.”

Susie did not explain “ why ; ” and Margaret did not ask her ; but she would not have liked it to be Mr. Churchill either.

CHAPTER IX.

It was almost dark. The clouds, after veering and floating about all day, had closed down with an ashen, sombre hue in the twilight; and snow began to fall finely and evenly, as if the storm intended to come to something of consequence—a rare thing for the climate and the season, a fine thing for boys rejoicing in their first pair of boots, or for young ladies looking forward to a real sleigh-ride. It was watched with this delightful anticipation by two gay young creatures from the windows of a wide, old-fashioned house in Arch Street.

“My dear child!”—and a small head, made the most of by broad bandeaux evidently arranged with especial care, made its appearance from behind a heavily embroidered lace curtain—“do see it come down! I hope it will last till Christmas. Snow makes every thing so lively in the holidays!”

A momentary apparition of a fair face, with soft large curls half hiding it, looked out for a moment from the opposite recess.

“Sleighting, you mean? Yes, indeed! What are you all going to do on Christmas?”

“Dear knows! What do you expect to get? Papa keeps watch over mother, or I know she’d let out my present. I know she’s dying to tell me now.”

“I haven’t an idea; but I’ve set my heart on furs, my stone-marten is so shabby; besides, nobody wears stone-marten now.”

The subject seemed to be suggestive. Both looked out, and watched the snow again, and the few foot passengers, most of them gentlemen returning from business, in a silence that was wonderful, considering that they were not above eighteen, either of them, intimate friends, and had not seen each other before for a day and a half.

“What in the world can keep Agnes?” said the lady of the bandeaux, at last. “We shall be late, as sure as the world, Joe.”

“And your brother!” suggested Miss Josephine, whose watch was confined solely to hats and overcoats, while her friend Kate had been counting

the minutes between passing omnibuses. It was the night of the first Musical Fund concert, the opening of the season; and their toilets were already completed. No wonder that they were impatient for the arrivals that were to signal the tea-bell! "How late it is!" And a tiny watch was drawn out for the fifth time, at least, within the half hour.

"Suppose we practise a little while? That will make the time go faster."

Josephine made an impatient, restless movement.

"Oh, I can't settle myself to any thing when I'm going out! I haven't been able to do a thing all day."

"It's very stupid and unkind in both of them," said Kate. How she would have done battle if any one else had presumed to say the same! "Here comes Agnes at last, I do believe." And she flew into the hall, anticipating her sister's ring by throwing open the door, and pulling her in with both hands. A gentleman came up the steps at the same moment, knocking the snow lightly from his boots as he entered.

"Tea, right away!" called the younger sister to the servant, who appeared at the head of the stairs.

“What could you be thinking of, Lewis? Josephine and I have been waiting this half hour. The carriage will be here before you are ready.”

“Plenty of time, Kate,” said her brother, quietly, as gentlemen always do, no matter how much their tardiness has flurried you, or how few minutes are between you and a positive engagement.

“How delightfully warm the hall is!” Agnes said, throwing her victorine over her arm, and looking around with a light shiver, more suggestive of past than present discomfort. “And the parlor looks so cheerful! Really, Kate, I don’t think you know how pleasant your home is! you are always in such a hurry to get out of it.”

“You can have it all to yourself, then, this evening. Father and mother have gone to Anne’s to tea.”

“That’s too bad! I don’t like the idea of leaving you all alone,” said her brother, quickly.

Agnes looked up with a bright, fond smile.

“Thank you, Lewis; but you know I never mind it. I’m glad father has persuaded mother to go. I think I had better send for them before the carriage goes for you. I shall not care in the least.”

“Truly?”

“Truly. I'm going to make out my reports. It will be a nice opportunity; and I like to do it when I have my visits all fresh in my mind.”

“So you've been among your poor people, this afternoon. You're a good creature.” And he stopped to smile and bow to Miss Josephine Wright, as she appeared in the parlor-door, thinking, as he did so, how very pretty and animated she was.

Never was there a more affectionate family than the Churchill, for this is their home; and yet, somehow, these young people enjoyed their tea-table chat amazingly in the absence of their elders and betters. There was a certain novelty and sense of freedom to talk what nonsense they liked, with Agnes at the tea-tray, and Lewis seated in his father's arm-chair directly opposite. There was very little appetite for the cold tongue and wafer-like biscuit on the part of Kate and Josephine, however, who were listening every moment for the roll of the carriage. They began to think Agnes and Lewis never would be satisfied.

Then came the hooding and cloaking in the hall, with all manner of jests and compliments—

Josephine looking prettier than ever in the tasseled rigolette and pink cashmere wrap, which she called a cloak, though it was well that she had only to cross the pavement, if she put her sole dependence in it for shelter. The heedless Kate, though she had groaned over their detention, discovered, at the last moment, that she had neither gloves nor handkerchief, and that she had left her fan on the table in the dining-room; finally, that Lewis had no opera-glass; and there was no earthly use in going to a concert without a glass.

“Do you hear with your eyes, Kate?” asked Agnes.

“To see you the better, my dear,” sang Kate, as she snatched the box from the servant, and ran down the steps to the carriage, where Josephine impatiently awaited her.

So they were gone at last; and “sister Agnes,” as she was usually called by them, turned to her own room for a quiet evening. There was no self-denial involved in its seclusion; it was oftener the reverse—that she gave up its stillness, regretfully, for the family circle, or what she really had very little fancy for—general society.

The room seemed to welcome her, as she enter-

ed it, with a glow of warmth and comfort, the cheerful fire in the grate throwing its red light over the close-drawn hangings of the windows, and the white counterpane, and still whiter pillows of the bed. The gas was shaded just as she liked it, the glare softened, and thrown down upon the round table with its books, the rosewood desk, and many pretty fanciful appliances for work or study. She had been an invalid when she learned to love her room so much ; but there was no trace of it in the arrangements now, aside from the low easy-chair on one side of the fire, and a couch, almost too comfortable for health, occupying the opposite corner.

“Sister’s room” was a favorite resting-place for the whole family. Mrs. Churchill came there to discuss household plans and perplexities ; Kate flitted in and out all hours of the day ; and Lewis found the evening indefinitely prolonged when he claimed privileged admittance after the breaking up of the family circle.

She was wearied both in mind and body ; her walk had been unusually long ; and the tea-table chat had left an uncomfortable impression, though it might be only fatigue, after all ; for, as she

leaned back in the easy-chair, shading her eyes from the firelight, an attitude habitual to her, she came to think only of the comforts and blessings of her lot. She had laid out the printed blanks for her monthly reports to the good rector of their parish; and, though she read over the sentence printed warningly at their head—"It is required of a steward that he be found faithful"—she sank into a reverie; while the snow fell noiselessly without, muffling all ruder sounds.

CHAPTER X.

THE evening flew by with swift unconsciousness. Agnes could scarcely believe it had gone, when the little bustle below announced the early arrival of her father and mother; and in due time the concert-goers made their appearance, Kate, as usual, in a great state of excitement, describing audience and performers in a breath.

“We had capital seats, after all, sister Agnes—side seats. You don’t know how Lewis kept us waiting, mother.”

“For my gloves or fan, which?”

“Well, but you did. I should have been all in order, if you had come in good season. But we had capital seats, after all—next to the Flag party, only think! Oh, it was as good as a play to watch them! Mrs. Flag waddling in, with Jack Blair trotting after, as if he had been a spaniel or a footman, carrying her opera-glass with her everlasting

blue hood over his arm. I wonder if any one ever saw Mr. Flag. Is there any Mr. Flag, papa, or is he a myth? Lewis was devoted to Helen Florence in the recess. My dear Agnes, you should have seen him! made Joe as jealous as possible. Oh, I wish you could have heard Truffi sing that Rieci Waltz! Joe hardly spoke to Lewis coming home."

"Pshaw!" interrupted Lewis.

"You know she didn't; of course, I understood it. She broke her new sandal-wood fan, she flirted it so hard to show she didn't care."

"And Kate had five gentlemen around her at once," said Lewis, in self-defence, for Agnes was looking at him with an inquiring scrutiny.

"I dare say." And Mr. Churchill, senior, gave that low, mellow, but all-pervading laugh that was so peculiar to him, betokening satisfaction with self and the world in general. "What a puss!" It was plain to see what delight he took in the conquests of his peculiar pet by the pinch he gave her white arm shining through the lace of her flowing sleeves.

"She kept them all going at once," added her brother, wickedly, "like Signor Blitz and his half dozen dancing plates."

“ A great pity if Joe and I couldn't have two and a half apiece. Besides, little Martin only counts half a one at any time. He says he shall be at riding-school in the morning ; and that reminds me—Joe is coming in early to try that duo in Semiramide they sung to-night. Oh, Agnes, I wish you could have heard it ! How well Truffi dresses ! doesn't she, Lewis ? though you don't know, of course. Some of them get themselves up abominably. I saw Pierson Hunter's head popping up, every now and then, from that orchestra trap-door arrangement. Didn't you, Lewis ? Joe says he was at the Birneys, last Friday, and actually danced.”

The silvery chime of the mantel-clock broke in on this lively tirade.

“ Eleven ! is it possible ? Well, I must march off to bed, if I am to be up so early. Good night, mother ! good night, papa ! ” And she stooped to kiss him heartily before she vanished.

“ What a chatterbox ! ” said Lewis, as the door closed upon her graceful exit. “ She looked so well, to night, I was really proud of her. ”

“ She always *will* be careless, though,” sighed the prudent Mrs. Churchill. “ Only see how she

leaves her things around—the piano and sofa fairly strewn with them; and there are her carriage boots on the mantel-piece.”

“Never mind! I will take up the entire collection,” said Agnes, rising, with a sudden recollection of the lateness of the hour.

As she passed her father, he drew her down, and kissed her forehead. “Good-night, dear daughter!” And there was a shade more of earnestness in his tone than when addressing the petted Kate.

She was scarcely seated at her desk to note down the more needful memoranda of her visits when Lewis knocked for admission.

“Busy? I did not think you would work so late; and somehow an evening never seems finished until we have had our talk.”

“Come in; the morning will do quite as well, perhaps better than to-night; I am quite stupid.” And she pushed the papers away to show him that he was welcome. Certainly all the elements for a cozy chat were there; and Lewis stretched himself lazily by the fire, and absently took up a paper knife by way of a screen.

“What made you so sober to-night, Agnes?”

“Where? at the tea-table? I was thinking of a family I had seen this afternoon, especially of a young girl scarcely older than Kate, and what thoughtless, purposeless lives these two were leading, when so many of their own age had actually commenced ‘the struggle for life.’”

“You do not like Josephine!”

“I do not *dislike* her,” said Agnes, evasively. “She is certainly amiable and lady-like, but as thoughtless as Kate herself, and—”

“And what?”

“*Characterless*. If there was necessity, Kate’s natural energy would exert itself. I do not think Josephine has the same decision and strength of purpose to fall back upon.”

“What about that family you saw to-day?” asked Lewis, changing the subject abruptly.

Agnes’s face lighted.

“Oh, I told you something about them two or three weeks ago, or of one of them—a little girl with very wistful eyes, and such fair hair.”

“In tangles, that might be curls for the brushing,” said Lewis, quoting from the previous description.

“Yes; that’s the one.”

“She promised to come to Sunday-school, or something of that sort, didn't she?”

“She wanted to come. The child was anxious enough; but there was a mother to be asked. They live in Shippen Court.”

“What! below Almond Street? Why, Agnes, what walks you take! You ought to arrange it so as to have the carriage. It's out of the world.”

“Not quite. Besides, I patronize omnibuses liberally. Ruth Norton, that nice little old body you know, told me she was sick. I stopped there to inquire the way.”

“Just what mother said you would happen on after you went out at dinner-time. She had quite a little fever about you. Some one had been telling her there was much sickness in the lower part of the city. Really, Agnes, you must be careful! What in the world should we all do without you?”

A bright, affectionate glance thanked him for his brotherly solicitude, as Agnes went on to prove there was no necessity for caution: “It was nothing infectious, or I should not have considered it right to go. A lung fever, or pleurisy, something of that sort. The poor little thing had over-

worked herself. It seems there are younger children in the family, and she has strained herself taking care of them. I saw the mother first—not her own mother. She opened the door, and held it just so wide, with a baby in her arms, a cross, sour-looking child.”

“Didn’t she ask you in?”

“Oh, very few do *that!* I’m quite used to it now. I asked if I *might* come in; and she looked half inclined to refuse me then. I did not think I should see the child at all. Susie her name is.”

“So I suppose you humbly asked permission for that, too,” said Lewis, laughing at the idea of his sister’s seeking a favor where he considered her conferring a very great one.

“I managed to see the child, at any rate, and was more than repaid for the ungraciousness of the mother by the pleasure it gave her. Oh, Lewis, I wish you could have seen that little pale face light up? I was struck in a moment by the difference between up stairs and down. The room was no better, not so good; but it positively had an air of elegance. Now, don’t laugh; not in furniture—I don’t mean that, but the arrangements.”

“Romantic to the last! How much am I to allow for embellishments in these narratives of yours?”

“Well, let me tell you. There was a dressing-table for one thing—one of those pine half circles, I suppose the foundation was, but covered nicely with white, and arranged as carefully as mine is there.”

Agnes glanced contentedly around the room, and thought of the contrast between it and this unknown young girl's humble chamber. She had seen it precisely as it was left by Margaret in the morning: the curtains of cheapest white muslin, looped neatly back; the bits of carpet on each side of the bed arranged smooth and straight; the books—Margaret's only treasures—in perfect order on the swinging shelf; while a willow work-basket stood before the old-fashioned low wooden chair, half turned to the window. As Agnes had said, despite its plainness and poverty, there was a home-like air through the room, suggestive of natural taste and refinement, scarcely less than that exhibited in the pretty trifles she had gathered about her.

Lewis was the regular recipient of his sister's

adventures among her little flock, and listened at first chiefly because he saw she was greatly interested in this new member of it ; but presently the playful carelessness of his expression changed when she came to Susie's artless revelations. A visitor all to herself was a great event to the child—above all, such a visitor ! one she had thought so much about, and to whom she could dwell on Margaret's numberless perfections, instinctively sure of sympathy. "Margaret had made the room so neat ; she always kept it just so ; she could not bear to have things lying about ; and she had nursed her so beautifully, and sewed so much for mother, and found time to read to her, too."

"And such books, Lewis !" His sister's natural enthusiasm rose with her theme. "I looked to see what they were, and I was never more surprised ; such books as *we* like—Thomas à Kempis ! only think ! and Jeremy Taylor ! half a dozen other volumes that I have here in the book-case ; besides Susie's favorite, 'The Parent's Assistant,' you used to like so much when you were a boy."

"'Lazy Lawrence,' and 'The Little Merchants !' I haven't thought of them in an age. I

suppose you saw this wonderful Margaret?" And, as he spoke the name, a sudden recollection flashed upon him of those same wistful eyes appealing to him from his clerk's teasing, and of the Margaret who had greeted the child so affectionately.

"No; but I want you to point her out to me the next time I come to the store. I was quite astonished when her sister wound up the history by telling me she was in it, and how good Mr. Churchill had been 'to let sister stay home a whole week, and nurse her, when the other gentleman said No.' Don't you feel flattered?"

But Lewis did not smile now. He was thinking what a very odd coincidence.

"Is she pretty? I'm sure she must be ladylike, at all events."

"Very ladylike, and quiet. I remember about the leave of absence; she only came back to-day."

"So Miss Susie informed me, and told me a great many other things. Perhaps I ought not to have listened; but it appeared to give the child so much pleasure; and I don't know *when* I have been so much interested. I should suppose Margaret nearly supported the whole family."

“Where’s the father? What *is* he?”

“A genius, as near as I could make out, slightly mad on the subject of perpetual motion, or some such fancy. Susie said something about a patent that took so much money, and her father making machinery.”

“I know him—about him, I mean. Is *that* her father? Mr. Dunlap was telling me only a few days ago. He applied to him to get some kind of a patent through. Why, Agnes, it’s odd, isn’t it?”

“Very,” said Agnes, warmly. “It’s hard, though, for this young girl, isn’t it? And then the mother and those children! She must have a great deal to contend with, though Susie was too well taught to speak of family differences. I could see for myself, when I came down stairs again, the mother evidently did not like my long stay. I am very glad I went, though she would not give a promise about the Sunday-school. I don’t intend to lose sight of them.”

Lewis did not volunteer any remark. She looked to see what occupied him. It was the broken fan, Josephine Wright’s, which he had taken out of his pocket, and was trying to put together.

“So it was true, then, Josephine’s mishap.” She thought perhaps he was tired of her *protégées*, and, grateful for the interest he had already shown, was ready to talk of what he cared so much for. “You will have to give her another. Christmas will be a good opportunity.”

“Yes. It is almost here. What made you look at me so steadily when Kate told that ridiculous story? She broke it tying her hood, just as we came away; and, as a dutiful cavalier, I picked up the pieces.”

“Oh, we had been holding a council of war—father, and mother, and ‘sister Agnes!’ Father asked who had gone with you, and then suggested that it was high time you were married.”

“To Josephine!” Lewis started up, and leaned against the mantel in an attitude particularly *manish*, back to the fire.

“Not exactly.” Agnes scarcely knew whether to smile or be troubled at the start. “That made him think of it, I suppose, at the moment; and mamma said there was a house next to Anne’s that would just suit young beginners. I suppose Anne had said how nice it would be if you *should* marry and take it. Mother was in raptures with Char-

ley, as usual. He really tries to walk a little. I don't know but I'm quite as proud of him as they are."

"Agnes," said Lewis, relapsing into a gravity more like the "young Mr. Churchill" of the store than any look he had worn since entering the house, "why is it that the best of people can't let well enough alone, and are always match-making for any one who has reached twenty-five or seven, without making one for themselves? Can't people be just as happy single? Is Anne any better off than you are with her housekeeping troubles and Charley's teeth! Now, do you really think so, Agnes?"

A shadow, as of sudden painful thought, passed over the face into which he looked so earnestly; but he was too much engrossed with the thought of the moment to remember what secret spring he had touched.

"Those who love each other truly think it the only real happiness—marriage, I mean. Father and mother, now—what satisfaction they take in each other's society, and in us! That is what I often think of. Single life is well enough in youth, with its hundred pleasures and pursuits, or through

life, if God so order it ; but, if He leaves the choice to us—a childless, companionless old age ! think of it, Lewis !—how much life-discipline it will take to make us cheerful then, unselfish, and useful to others, feeling all the while that there is no one on whom you have the claim of the nearest ties and affections ! ”

That she had thought of it with more than common feeling was evident in the tremulous though eager tone in which she spoke.

“Forgive me, sister ! I did not think ! do forgive me ! ” Lewis took the hands she had unconsciously clasped together in his own. “But let me ask you one thing more. I am in serious earnest. Tell me what *you* think are the elements of a happy marriage—what should you look to first of all.”

“Principle,” said Agnes, earnestly, “religious principle ; for all others will be found wanting, if it be put to the test of a harsh experience ; and then there is no fear of habit or temper, if it be carried into daily life. ‘Charity suffereth long, and is kind,’ you know, ‘doth not behave itself unseemly.’ That whole description is only the

portrait of a true Christian woman or man, thoughtful, considerate for others, gentle in speech and action, the truest refinement. This, united with sympathy of intellect and heart, goes to make up the firm, unshaken trust and life-long friendship which seem to me the only true marriage."

"Thank you, Agnes," said her brother, abruptly; "God bless you, dear sister!"

So they separated; but she heard him, long after, walking up and down in his own room, the movement betraying in him restless thought or quiet deliberation. For herself, painful memories, and long-stifled yearnings had been called forth, an old struggle renewed, which she had thought ended forever; and she could only pray for the peace which it was the study of her life to attain, and which is surely promised to those who seek it.

As if in answer to the strong crying of her lonely heart, the rhythm of one of her favorite Keble's most consoling thoughts floated like a strain of music through her mind as she tried to find forgetfulness of the past in sleep;—

"Why should we faint, and fear to live alone,
Since all alone, so Heaven has willed, we die?
Not even the tenderest heart, and next our own,
Knows half the reason why we smile or sigh."

And again :—

“O Lord, my God, do Thou Thy holy will!
I will lie still.
I will not stir, lest I forsake Thine arm,
And break the charm
Which lulls me, clinging to my Father's breast,
In perfect rest.

“To the still wrestlings of the lonely heart,
He doth impart
The virtue of that midnight agony
When none was nigh
Save God, and one good angel to assuage
The tempest's rage.”

CHAPTER XI.

THERE are some days occurring in protracted storms when the clouds break away unexpectedly, and the sunshine and blue sky gladden us, though we say to ourselves, unbelievably, that it cannot last, and there is more darkness for the morrow. So it was in Margaret's horizon the day of her return to her duties. Her heart beat free and fast. Her step unconsciously followed the quickened pulse. It was more physical than mental exhilaration, for there were the little debts of the week past rising now and then to her remembrance like sharp stings. There was the danger of a relapse for Susie, especially now that she was left to herself again; and the moral atmosphere of her home was unchanged, after all her seeking for peace. But she kept all these afterthoughts in abeyance; she was returning to active duty; Susie was better for the time, at least; the sun shone; the air

was fresh and bracing. Margaret wondered how she could have given up so entirely to despondency the week before.

There was one unaeknowledged element in this change of mood. She should see the kind friend who had procured her the respite so much desired, and perhaps have an opportunity to thank him, and say that her sister was convalescent, as he had kindly hoped she would be.

How cheerful the old store looked that morning! How pleased the girls seemed to be in having her back again! She felt a kindly glow towards all; and they noticed how communicative and even playful she had grown in her absence.

“It’s just one of Addy Long’s stories, depend upon it,” said Marianne, as she left the little cloak-room.

“What is?” asked a new-comer, who had been appointed to her situation since Margaret had left. “Who is that—the girl that just spoke to you? What a sweet smile she has, and a nice figure, too! If she only was dressed better, she would be what people call queenly.”

Miss McIlvaine was fond of novel-reading, and used superlatives.

“Margaret Grant queenly! in that everlasting chintz frock and linen collar!”

There was a false note in the laugh which Addy Long, just entering, intended to be extremely merry—a harsh, scornful tone, that jarred all the more coming from such beautiful lips.

“Is that Miss Grant? I thought you said she was not coming back.”

“Well, I did think so; but it seems she’s here again; can’t take a hint; it was a polite way of giving her a dismissal, for nobody ever heard of leave of absence, except one week in summer, when Caleb Choate is about. Pity she hadn’t understood it!”

“What makes you always so spiteful towards Margaret?” asked Ellen Boyne, who was never afraid of expressing her opinion. “For my part, I don’t believe there’s any thing wrong at all; or, if there is, it isn’t Margaret.”

Addy Long turned with a stamp of her foot and an angry light in her eyes—

“What do you mean, Ellen Boyne? Do you mean me? You’d better not!”

“Take any cap that fits,” returned the other, with provoking carelessness. “Those that live in

glass houses know whether stones hurt. You're jealous of her ; you know you are. You've been ten times as spiteful since Lemon actually went to see her."

"The best thing he could do. Once was enough. I only wish you could hear him tell it himself! Though, to be sure, he only went out of curiosity. Of course, such a man as Albert Wood never could fancy such a plain, stuck-up creature."

"There she goes!" said Ellen to her new acquaintance ; "that's just like her! She can't bear to have any of us noticed, and is jealous of Margaret about customers and all. For my part, I don't care a pin, only Margaret's worth ten of her. You'll find us all out in time."

Fortunately for Margaret's present mood, the hurry of the day prevented any collision between herself and her pretty neighbor ; although it gave her only the most distant glimpse of Mr. Churchill, and allowed no opportunity for thanks. So the hours ran on smoothly enough ; and at night came an unlooked-for happiness.

Do not smile, dear ladies, because the unexpected receipt of so pitiful a sum as four dollars made Margaret happy. It would be nothing to

Mrs. Bond, whose husband, having been successful in yesterday's speculation, has divided with her and poured ten bright golden eagles into her willing hand. Josephine Wright, with a party of young friends, has just spent the amount, without a thought, for confectionery, at Parkinson's. But Josephine has only to say, "Please, Papa," and display her empty purse to have it filled again. Mrs. Bond has hurried down town, not to settle her little bill for the party dresses, but to spend half of this unlooked-for prize in a set of lace and embroidery, to be worn with the brocade. Mrs. Bond thinks—for she does think sometimes—what weary work those store girls have; and wonders what enjoyment of life ever falls to their share. She has forgotten that a new pupil once caused her more pleasure than the set she has just secured at twice the cost of the lessons she toiled through cold and heat to give.

The regular day of settlement for the salaries had occurred in Margaret's absence; and, while she was thinking within herself whether to ask Mr. Choate for the amount due her, which was most pressingly needed at home, one of the cash boys laid a note on the counter before her. It was

an unprecedented thing with her to receive a letter from any one; but the clear handwriting on this envelop left no place for speculation as to its authorship. It was the simplest of business transactions; yet Margaret's heart overflowed with happy thoughts as she read it:—

“Miss Grant will please find enclosed the amount of her month's salary.

“LEWIS CHURCHILL.”

There was the amount in full; but it might have been an oversight; if not, how very kind and thoughtful! Mr. Choate would know when she went to sign her receipt; but Mr. Choate was not disposed to countenance this irregularity by discussion. “If his partner had enclosed it, there could be no error. Mr. Churchill was always correct.” Even Miss Choate was transiently softened for Margaret's day of sunshine, and appeared a degree less curt and unapproachable than usual. Ellen Boyne was folding together a remnant of mousseline as she returned to her post. “Pretty, isn't it? Somebody will get a child's frock out of it at a bargain,” she said, holding it up for a moment to pin a memorandum of the reduced price upon it. It was the crimson pattern Susie had admired so

much. Margaret had seldom made even the most trifling purchase without the grave deliberation which necessity had made second habit ; but just at that moment she felt so rich, and so hopeful for the future—she could not have told why—that she made Susie a sharer in the day's happiness by the purchase of the coveted frock.

The weight of the little package, trifling as it was, kept her in a glow of satisfaction all the way home, although the weather had changed, and long before her walk was ended the feathery snow-flakes had covered the side-walk. Fortune had certainly conspired towards Margaret's red-letter day. Her father was at home before her, an unusual thing of late ; and Mrs. Grant, with her baby on her lap, sat comfortably before the stove, her face beaming with the effulgence of the cloud-castles she was already constructing.

“ Ah, Margaret ! ”—and her father started up as she opened the door—“ tired, eh ? Snowing ? Why, you don't say it's snowing ! I just came in, and I didn't notice it. Never mind ; you won't have the walk much longer. There's not a doubt left now ”—and out leaped the precious tidings—

“not a doubt. We’re just as sure of that patent as we are of New Year.”

“Oh, father!”—she was just in the mood to be dazzled by the prospect—“oh, it can’t really be so!”

“Sure as fate; though we sha’n’t hear positively for a day or two yet. Mr. Adams wouldn’t make Cooper an offer for his share on an uncertainty. No, of course not, such a matter-of-fact man as he is!”

“Did he really? Oh, father, what if it should come to anything after all!”

“Should? Why, it *has* child! You shall have every cent back, and more, too, next month, this time.”

“The first thing to be done is to move into a little more respectable neighborhood,” suggested Mrs. Grant, whose ideas of gentility had never been satisfied with a *court* life. “I should think we might go into South or Lombard. There’s some nice private houses in South; and one thing I’m bound to have—front stairs, and a stair-carpet, and brasses—something like folks. I’ve lived long enough in this kind of style, I can tell you!”

The door at the foot of the offending back

stairs was open. "Margaret!" called a faint, impatient little voice from the chamber above.

"Yes, dear." And, hiding the child's present under her shawl, with a half smile of expectancy at the pleasure it was to give, Margaret turned to go.

"Oh, Margaret!" called her father, "you had better say to Mr. Churchill, to-morrow, that he must look out for some one to take your place. I can't have *a child of mine* standing behind a counter, at any one's beck and call after this!"

The poor haggard face lighted up with a pitiful pride; but it was only natural when such great good fortune had befallen him, and when he really loved Margaret better than anything but this dumb idol, this patent.

"Oh, dear, I thought you never would come up! What were you all talking about down there?" was Susie's salutation. "Never mind, though, now. The lady's been here, Margaret—been here to see me, just me! and she stayed—oh, ever so long, and talked so much!"

Here Susie's conscience checked her a little; for, now that she came to think of it, she had done most of the talking herself.

"What lady?" said Margaret, holding up the

package. "See there, Miss Susie, somebody's Christmas present!"

"Did you have one? Did Mr. Churchill give it to you? Oh, I'm so glad!"

It never occurred to Susie that she could be the recipient.

Margaret snapped the string of the parcel, and tossed it into the bed.

"Does that look like me? who said they thought it was pretty enough for a queen?"

Susie was no monarchist. All her queens dwelt in fairy-land; and, when Margaret had lighted the lamp, and held it close to the soft, bright folds, Susie thought that if winter ever came to that blissful region, Titania herself might be glad to have anything so pretty in her wardrobe. Even the visit which she had been burning with impatience to tell Margaret about was eclipsed for the time. Susie had never had an entirely new dress bought for her in all her life before. She returned to its contemplation constantly through the evening, breaking off from fragmentary snatches of the visitor's conversation, and did not at all mind Margaret's preoccupation, as she bent over her needle.

Down stairs, there was a murmur of voices un-

til long after Susie fell asleep, wondrous plans laid for the future, interspersed with reflections from Mrs. Grant "on people that had held their heads a little too high, and were now to see that some other people were as good as they." Mrs. Grant's world was quite as well worth striving to outshine, in her estimation, as your world and my world seem to us; and she gloried chiefly in the sensation she was about to make in its midst.

Margaret's secret exultation may have been equally at fault; but, for that night at least, she gave full scope to imagination, and dreamed waking dreams of the possible. Her heart had given a great bound, and freed itself from the restraint in which it had been held so firmly. If it were so, all true, as her father said, what strange things might not come to pass! And she took out the little note, looking through a bewildering mist at the clear, decided signature of a name—she denied it to herself no longer—that had the power to thrill her heart with almost as wild a pulse as the low words or the kindly glance that had been bestowed on her penury of love and sympathy from time to time. The business formality and coldness

were nothing. Her own name and his were written there on the self-same sheet.

It was a wild reckless mood to which she had given way; and, though all alone in the solitude of her room, her face burned with blushes at the daring thought that one day they might meet on more equal ground, where it would be no longer madness to return the kindly pressure of his hand, and look up into his eyes. She did not check it fully; no, not even when she felt that the dream came between her soul and Heaven. She could not cast it out wholly; and she could not pray while she refused to do so.

Poor Margaret! if she could have seen him at that moment, with the intoxicating light and perfume, music and beauty around him, or rising up to leave the crowded hall, with that fair, slender figure leaning so closely on his arm, while he stooped almost to the touch of those soft curls, in reply to the pretty shiver and complaint of the crowd and the cold night air! It may be that the angel of sweet dreams might not have met the warning at her pillow—

“Stand off!
She sleeps, and did not pray!”

CHAPTER XII.

THE snow continued to fall heavily through the night, and, at the early hour which called Margaret forth, was not removed from the side-walks. It clung to her feet and dress with a dreary chill ; while overhead the clouds hung low and dusky, as if the storm was stayed, not spent ; but, so long as it kept in abeyance, its gift must be improved, and early in the day the merry sound of sleigh-bells broke in upon the jar and clash of wheels in the broader streets. It was too precious and too fleeting for a moment to be wasted ; and, though the equipages were by no means as elegant as where the sleighing carnival is always to be counted on, and extends to days and weeks instead of hours, comfort and merriment were the order of the day. It was an idle morning in-doors, as well as out ; and every one had leisure to watch and com-

ment upon those who were enjoying themselves abroad. Even Margaret welcomed the distraction from her own thoughts, and leaned with the rest near the great Arch Street window, as the day wore on ; and the fairy gift already began to vanish before the noonday sun.

“ Who are those in that double sleigh there ? see ! ” called out one of the girls, eagerly. “ Do take your head out of the way, Margaret ! There ! they’re out of sight already ! ”

“ What kind of horses ? ” asked the new “ young lady,” who, having come from Lowry’s, took a decided stand among her new associates. “ I know every carriage in town ; but sleighing time puzzles me ; that’s the worst of it ; you can’t tell who’s who. ”

“ Oh, look at that little black pony ! what a pretty sleigh ! how they dash along ! don’t you envy them, Addy ? ”

“ I sha’n’t ; if it will only hold out till night, I shall be dashing about myself. ” And Miss Long glanced complacently towards the side window, where Mr. Wood was displaying his elegant locks.

“ Every body isn’t so fortunate. I never had a sleigh ride in my life, and I never expect to have.

There is that double sleigh again coming up, slower now, too. It's hard work; the snow has melted so fast the last hour."

"Why, I know those grays! to be sure! Why, they are Mr. Churchill's! and there are his daughters and Mrs. Churchill herself. Who's that on the front seat? Mr. Churchill has been driving."

"So it is. They're coming in. Yes, Margaret, who is that with Miss Kate? Isn't she pretty? Here come some other people, too. I guess our fun is over for the day." And the little group dispersed reluctantly to attend to the several arrivals.

Margaret's eyes were fixed unconsciously on the Churchill family, as they were met by Mr. Lewis, who came out of his office, the first time she had seen him that day. The young ladies seldom came to the store. Miss Churchill did not care for shopping; and Miss Kate had usually too many engagements with her riding-school, French, music, and visiting, the usual round of young ladies at her age in Philadelphia. On Mrs. Churchill, therefore the chief duty of providing for the family wants fell; and her kind, motherly face was almost as familiar as her husband's at her son's place of business. Even when she had no special call, she

liked to hover about the house-furnishing department, patting the soft English blankets with a loving appreciation, admiring Miss Choate's favorite patterns of Irish damask, or giving her opinion, at the desire of this estimable custodian, of the new sheetings and long-cloths. It was evident that her house-keeping filled up what few vacancies were left by her husband and family in the affections of good Mrs. Churchill.

Straight to Miss Choate's domains she therefore betook herself, her ostensible errand being a piece of huckabuck for the servants' rooms, but which seemed to necessitate an elaborate review of every thing in the form, or that could be cut into the form of towelling, from damask to crash. Agnes accompanied her, and tried to give her opinion without being entirely at random; but her eyes stayed behind her if her thoughts had not been left there too; and, roused into notice by the conversation of the evening before, she watched her brother and the two young people under his charge unconsciously.

"How plain Miss Churchill is!" said Mariane, coming behind Margaret to replace some silks. "Don't you think so? She always dresses as if she didn't care how she looked."

“I don't think so. She does care enough to have every thing in perfect keeping; and those plain colors are becoming to her; with just enough rose-color inside her bonnet to relieve it.”

“Well, the other one is my favorite, any way. Isn't that friend of hers a beauty? How stylish her cloak is! It must be French. You know who she is, don't you?—Miss Wright!”

“Oh, such a piece of news! There! give me that merino quick! I only made it an excuse to come and tell you—Mr. Churchill's engaged!”

“There! I thought so!” exclaimed Mariane, as Ellen Boyne hurried back to her customer. “I never saw him pay so much attention to any one before. Just see! Now they're coming this way. She has taken his arm. Yes, it must be so. How devotedly he looks down at her! See, Margaret, she isn't in the least bashful! Engaged people do get so swallowed up in each other that they forget it isn't after ten o'clock, and the parlor to themselves *all* the while.”

She might have gone on any length of time. Margaret had heard nothing since Ellen Boyne's hurried announcement; and she sought the confirmation with her own eyes, though for a moment

every thing grew black before her. It was but an instant, though, and then the mist cleared away, and she saw them very near her—Miss Wright looking up into Mr. Churchill's face, as she made some playful remonstrance; and she heard his answer distinctly, and saw the look with which it was accompanied: "Your fan is in safe keeping. I was afraid you would take cold last evening."

"So they already exchanged love tokens; and they were together the evening before, at the very time, perhaps, that she was busy with her foolish dreams. Folly! It was worse than folly—unmaidenly. Conscience had whispered that at the time; but she would not listen; and now it was sinful, for he was claimed by another. The light, graceful figure, the lovely face, the costly raiment, how every thing combined to mock her! It was all right. His bride should be fair and tenderly nurtured. She looked down at her coarse dress, and thought of the still, white face the little mirror had reflected that morning. This young girl was all brillianey and animation; her soft, clear laughter, her bantering words, the freedom and naturalness with which she received his attentions, and the smile of satisfaction with which his young-

er sister watched their proceedings, left no room for doubt. Indeed, she had not for a moment sought to distract the pang of the announcement by questioning its truth. Why should it not be so? The only wonder was that he had so long remained without a choice among the bright circle his sisters drew around them. But no one, no one ever could—" And here she checked herself, as a scarlet flush rose and glowed on her face at the bold daring of the thought. Even to herself she would not acknowledge how well she might have loved him.

It was all over now, though; and there was nothing to prevent her from wishing him all happiness; and she looked again to see if he seemed really so happy as this should make him. But he had left the younger ladies with Mrs. Churchill, and was talking with his elder sister of something which she seemed to question and look disapprovingly about; and then why should they look towards her? It might be fancy; and Margaret turned away. But no; some fascination drew her glance back again; and she felt that, strange as it might be, they were talking of her, and gravely, too.

A deeper shame burned in Margaret's cheeks than that which the rebuke of unmaidenly thoughts had called there. In a moment, she seemed to comprehend it. Miss Choate was, in all probability, a sharer in all her brother's affairs. She had been talking to Miss Churchill. She must have told her about the missing robe. The gentle, noble-looking woman always unconsciously associated in Margaret's mind with all things lovely and pure. She knew, then, that a charge which could not be disproved had been made against her; and henceforth she must shun, rather than love to watch, those deep, far-seeing eyes.

It was true, Mr. Churchill said he did not credit the accusation; but that was a long time ago; and it might have been strengthened by those who had ill-will towards her, as she felt sure there were such near at hand. Or his chivalric sympathy might naturally enough have been overborne by Mr. Caleb's persistence in the charge. What could Mariane have meant by the mysterious hints that Addy Long had thrown out about her in her absence? Had the suspicion been gaining ground? Was it gathering against her, to break forth in open disgrace at any moment?

The brother and sister had left the rest, and she thought were turning to come directly past her. "She wishes to see if the guilt is betrayed in the hardened offender's face," thought Margaret, with a sudden bitter disdain towards them both, towards all, herself even, that she should become the object of such scrutiny. "But I will not bear it!" And in another moment her place was vacant, only to be resumed when she had assured herself, from her retreat in the cloaking-room, that there was no longer any encounter to dread. The square, old-fashioned but ample sleigh was drawn up directly before the window. She saw them come out, the young people first, and stand together on the sidewalk until the elder Mr. Churchill had finished his discussion of the European news with Mr. Choate. How prettily defined was the little foot, tapping the flag-stones with petty impatience! how clear and joyous those blue eyes, as if they had never known the heaviness of weeping, even for a broken flower! And slowly the great gulf between them widened, while Margaret stood face to face with her false dream of the future. How had it mocked her so, the little note placed carefully among her treas-

ures at home! How it seemed to chill her as she recalled it word for word! Yesterday, with its inclosure, it had seemed a token of watchful interest over her happiness and well-being; to-day, as alms bestowed upon one whose need stood plainly forth.

It was her father's credulous hope that had deceived her. What madness had possessed her to listen to it for a moment! How often before had success seemed equally certain, only to be followed by deeper despondency! What ground had he given her but his own craving desires, and the assertion of unscrupulous men, to whom it was but a passing thought, while to him it was life itself. How did they really stand? Poverty, domestic discord, weary toil were before her, perhaps utter loneliness, for how was Susie's enfeebled strength to meet the taskwork that she must soon return to? Worse than all, at that moment came the sting of a false accusation, robbing her of even respect, where her hungry heart clamored for love and sympathy.

She stood so self-absorbed in this dreary reverie, she had not heard any one enter the room, and started, as if an outward real blow had fallen,

when Ellen Boyne, coming beside her, said: "How well they look together! She will make a beautiful bride, won't she, with that hair and complexion?"

Margaret moved away.

"I must go back. Have I been here long, Ellen?"

"Long? Five minutes or so. Another won't make a killing difference, I guess. Wait a minute; I want to tell you something as soon as they're off. Now he's handed her in. You ought to see how he tucks that buffalo robe around her. What a smile he has! it brightens his whole face so. But la, he's as grave as a judge in the store always! I wonder when the wedding's going to come off?"

"What was it you wanted to tell me?" said Margaret, longing to escape, yet dreading to bring observation upon herself. She felt as if every one must see the struggle written in her face.

"Oh, there they go at last! Now he's waving his hand to her. Oh, I was going to tell you how I found out about it! I was up in Miss Choate's dominions after a piece of napkins for Mrs. Lovel, you know. I was waiting on her.

Well, while Spectacles was hunting about for it, I heard Mrs. Churchill say: 'I don't want the things just yet; but I thought I might as well be looking about. Of course, I shall have it all on my hands. Lewis has not the faintest idea of furnishing a house.' Miss Choate asked if it was 'a settled thing;' just like her. *She* comes under that head any way; and I didn't hear the first of what Mrs. Churchill said; but the end was that they had known each other a long time, and Miss Wright was an intimate friend of her daughters."

Margaret was gone without comment before this precious bit of gossip was concluded; but she could not escape. Such astonishing news was not to be set aside in a hurry by twenty young damsels, to whom weddings were the chief end of feminine existence; and she was doomed to hear it reviewed and commented on to the minutest item throughout the day.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ONE moment, Miss Grant, if I might presume!” called out Mr. Wood, as, thankful for the hour of release, she hurried from the door.

Mr. Wood was evidently bent on bestowing “the pleasure of his company;” and Margaret, though resentful, submitted passively, rather than subject herself to a scene. Just at this moment, when she could scarcely control her thoughts, it irritated her to be required to listen to his elevated conversation.

“A happy event this—unexpected *dénouement*, we might call it—our principal’s engagement. Excellent example, however, for us young people; something that comes sooner or later to all humanity, old bachelors excepted.” And Mr. Wood’s tone seemed to express a determination to submit

to his inevitable fate manfully when it did overtake him. "Charming face Miss Wright's. I have frequently admired her at the concerts, and occasionally when I have been thrown in her vicinity at the theatre. Golden charms, besides. When one is eminently a practical person, like myself, for instance, such things will weigh. Doubtless our principal has an eye to substantials—'flowers that never fade,' to borrow from the poets. In a wife, now, Miss Grant—in a wife, every thing ought to—to—centre. Don't you think so? elegance with utility, to make myself clearer."

Margaret bowed in response, and said she scarcely knew what. She only wished that Miss Long had not departed at an earlier hour than usual. It was to this that she was probably indebted for Mr. Wood's attendance on herself. His thoughts had also turned in the direction of their mutual acquaintance.

"Miss Wright is not unlike Miss Long in figure and general appearance. Strange coincidence! If Miss Long only possessed some of Miss Wright's solid attractions, what a prize she would become! Lovely creature! Miss Long I refer to now. On

the whole, I think her rather superior to Miss Wright—more style, decidedly—so guileless, too, so confiding. Do you know, Miss Grant, I dote on confidingness in women; it is so—so—so sweet, somehow.”

Something of Margaret's old merriment, like a fountain long choked by weeds and rubbish, bubbled up, and overflowed in smiles that the partial darkness concealed from her escort. They were nearing Chestnut Street, where she hoped to be relieved of his society. “Addy is certainly very beautiful,” she said, finding that he still paused for an audible response.

“By the way, that is a most unfortunate affair”—and Mr. Wood's face contracted to a close imitation of Mr. Choate's habitual frown when in deep thought—“most unfortunate to have suspicion come prowling ‘like an armed man’ among us. Of course, I allude to the suspicion that has fallen on some of the young ladies in your department. Miss Long informs me, though she did not specify the charge, that it has been pointed to one especially; and I trust the rest will soon be relieved from unjust censure by the punishment of the guilty party. Concealment is useless in such

a case ; and though a person might be said to stand

‘High as heaven,
And fair as light,’

justice tracks home the guilty secret. Every effort is being made I understand. Of course, I venture no personal allusions. Ah, here is Chestnut Street ! I have the honor to wish Miss Grant a very good evening.” And, adding a malicious glance to his parting thrust, Mr. Wood betook himself to the almost deserted promenade, to pass the remaining half hour before the shops were fairly closed, as a man of elegant leisure.

Margaret hurried on, feeling that her humiliation was complete, open insult added to all that had gone before that day ; and what was this net of suspicion and disgrace that seemed to be inclosing her on every side ? where had it originated ? how had she become so openly involved without being able to move hand or foot to free herself ?

Second Street was brilliantly lighted ; for Christmas being close at hand, every attraction was put forth in the shop windows to passers-by. Conspicuous among the almost unbroken line, the milliners displayed their graceful wares—headdresses and

plumes, suggestive of holiday merry-making—caps for more elderly party-goers, bright with knots of ribbon, and flowers, brighter than prize gardeners ever grew, blooming perennially in their velvet and gauze freshness. Bonnets were, after all, the chief article of commerce, chiefly noticeable for their brilliant hues and the variety of their decorations, pink and green being evidently the favorite colors of ladies shopping in Second Street, to judge from the stock on hand. Many a young girl occupied as Margaret was through the week, hurried here to spend the little that remained of her month's wages in some showy piece of finery. She could almost point them out, as they hovered about the enchanted windows, and passed back and forth from one establishment to another, fearful lest they should not get the most becoming or the most fashionable bonnet to be had.

“Everybody has some enjoyment but me,” thought Margaret. “Perhaps they are the wise ones, after all, and I the one to be pitied, as I have often pitied them. They are satisfied at least, and enjoy every thing as they go along. What is the use of trying to live a higher or a better life, always to be mocked, always to fail, even

when doing my best? I'm tired of it; I will not struggle on another day. There's Addy Long, even, happier than I am. She has all she aims at, and more, too. Nobody blames her, nobody suspects her; and yet I believe in my heart—"No, she could not go *that* length, even in her bitter mood; she could not accuse another without proof; and she tried to drown all thought as she turned aside from the more brilliant thoroughfare, with a sudden recollection of an unfulfilled promise to Mrs. Grant.

It was to call for a new bonnet which had been ordered, notwithstanding the pressing need of the family; for, although she talked much of never having any thing like other people, she usually contrived to shine forth resplendently when she made her appearance in the street. Even in this, Margaret was obliged to use self-control. She was neither "good nor happy," as Susie would have said, this evening; and the errand reminded her of the necessity that she herself should wear the twice re-made bonnet, her best already for two winters, that Mrs. Grant's new purple satin might be honestly paid for.

The little bell at the door-handle gave a shrill

warning of her entrance to the dimly lighted shop. Its business did not thrive sufficiently to allow of a more than the one oil-lamp in the window, which did its best to light up the festoons of faded ribbons and cotton laces around it—not that its proprietor lacked skill and taste in her little business; on the contrary, she had a local reputation for both, and was always promising herself to move up into Second Street, where she could have a better window and gas, and employ more hands; but the husband, always out of work, and the sickly little children that hung about her knees, kept her back, so that she barely fed and clothed them.

Margaret knew something of her story, and so tried not to feel impatient when the woman made her appearance from the inner room, with her pale, anxious face, and pincushion in hand. “The bonnet was almost done; ten minutes would complete it, if Miss Grant could wait so long. She was fitting a young lady, a new customer, and almost through, if Miss Grant would have the goodness to sit down five minutes, and please to excuse her.”

There was nothing in this dreary little shop,

with its almost empty show-cases, to change the current of Margaret's thoughts. She read and re-read in the attempt to divert them, the tin sign over the inner door—which had a sash window and white curtain—"Millinery and Dressmaking done here," and was fast relapsing into the miserable restlessness of the day, when she was startled by a familiar voice from the room to which the dressmaker had returned: "As tight as you can, now, without straining the seams."

Surely that was Addy Long herself; but what had brought her to this out-of-the-way place, when she prided herself so on being fashionable?

The dressmaker had left the door slightly ajar.

"You will be sure to have it done by Tuesday evening, now. Don't disappoint me for more than you are worth."

"It is for a ball, I suppose. Yes, I can make it a little tighter, and the side seams to slope more; but your waist is small enough, any way."

The shop was so still, Margaret could hear the worry of a child on the floor, the click of the scissors, and the very crackle of the lining, as the pins made their way through it.

"It's an elegant thing," said the woman, after

a little pause, evidently occupied by her customer by a self-satisfied survey of her slender waist and sloping shoulders in the glass. "It must have cost a great deal. It's handsome enough for a wedding dress."

"Perhaps it may be; who knows?" And there was a little laugh, as if the idea was not altogether new or unpleasant. "I got it for a party, though, Tuesday night. It's going to be a splendid affair."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if you was the belle there, flounces is *so* becoming to your figure. Is that low enough on the shoulders? Well, a trifle more. There!"

The curtain of the door moved a little just as Margaret, impelled by mingled fear and hope, rose silently to her feet. Oh, if she could just touch that door one inch further! and she might have proof, perhaps, not of the sin of another, it scarcely crossed her mind in the sudden hope of freeing herself from all suspicion. A shadow moved up and down on the curtain, a half-grown nurse tossing a fretful child to keep it quiet; and then it was wholly withdrawn, the sharp little faces of the nurse and her charge being pressed against

the glass in childish curiosity to see "the lady waiting."

The dressmaker and her customer both stood with their backs towards the door; and it was Addy Long's bright but evil face that was reflected in the mirror, as she surveyed her heightened beauty with visible satisfaction. Her hair, always elaborately plaited, stood out in full bands from her round, freshly-tinted face; her eyes were bright with anticipated triumph; the white, drooping shoulders, the slender waist, draped lightly with the gauzy folds of a soft, floating tissue. Fatal temptation! fatal triumph! The missing robe was found!

Margaret stood quite still, and wrung her hands closely: consciousness itself seemed for a moment to be forsaking her. But there was a quick movement from within. The young girl had caught sight, in the mirror, of the curtain withdrawn, and turned sharply round to the child, a guilty fear even then clouding her first satisfaction. Margaret saw her face still more distinctly for a moment; then the curtain fell, and she heard an admonitory blow administered

by the overtaken, irritated mistress to the tired bound girl.

Margaret sat down again, stunned, as if she herself had received it, unable to decide on any thing. Her first impulse was to rush away out into the night, back to the store—perhaps it was not too late—to his home, if he had gone there—anywhere, that she might clear herself in the eyes of one whose opinion was her world. Or, she could confront the real culprit, there where she stood with the glittering evidence of her guilt about her, and force a confession from her before witnesses? It would be very cruel; but had she not been cruelly dealt by, treacherously injured by the very one she shrank from exposing? But while these things whirled through her mind, the door opened, and Adelaide came out dressed for the street. There was no time to lose. She stood on the step separating the two rooms for a moment, one foot balanced for the descent, while she gave a parting charge, then passed so close that the hem of their dresses swept together; and Margaret's outstretched hand could have detained her. But she did not raise it, did not speak, scarcely breathe, lest she should lose all self-control, and

deny the creed which she had tried to make the daily rule of her life, and which even now rose warningly through the chaos of her thoughts: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even also so to them."

CHAPTER XIV.

“ISN'T it most time to get ready for church, sister?”

Susie had been promised that she should sit up all the afternoon, and was in a great hurry to have the morning go by. The bells were ringing, and Margaret had accomplished her double duty—the work down stairs, and the care of their own room; yet she still sat by the window, leaning her head down, apparently looking into the street below. She saw, indeed, the houses, and the little stir of the neighborhood, but it all passed unconsciously before her. The milk-shop on the corner, with the two tin cans standing on the pavement before the door, was the centre of attraction. Shivering little girls, Susie's age, or younger, with their unfastened dresses betraying a poverty of underclothing, and their stockingless feet, protect-

ed only by dilapidated shoes—or boys, Master Washington's week-day associates, with the little earthen pitcher slung on their arms, and both hands in their pockets for warmth, were the general messengers. Now and then, an unshaven man, with the soil of the six days' work still upon him, or a slatternly belated housewife, made their appearance on the same errand, or to bring water from the hydrant, nearer still to Margaret's window. One or two decent-looking church-goers issued forth, an entire family, father, mother, and two toddling little ones, in answer to the summons of the church bells, which now increased their cheerful clamor, as if to arrest those who were usually unmindful of their voices.

Susie wondered what had happened to Margaret since Friday, the memorable day on which the new dress was bought. She had been so cheerful and bright all through her stay at home, and especially that evening came hurrying up stairs, and gave her such a great hearty kiss on both cheeks, encouraging her to talk about the home of their own, that they were to have some day, which had now become a fixed idea with Susie. She looked at her sister wistfully, and thought it

would be pleasanter if Margaret would always be cheerful, as she once was, and not have these long sober *thinking* times, when she would look and look so earnestly at one thing, whether it was her work, or a book, or the floor, it did not seem to make a great deal of difference which.

“Ain't you afraid you'll be late?” urged Susie presently. Margaret, herself, had taught the child the most exacting punctuality in church-going.

“I don't think I shall go to-day.”

“Don't you? I didn't know you were sick, sister. Is it your head?”

“No,” said Margaret, turning around, shortly. “What makes you think I'm sick? Yes, I am, Susie. Sick? Yes, heart-sick,” she said, despairingly, to herself.

“I thought you must be.” Susie was at once satisfied that there was a reason for Margaret's dulness, but very sorry that she was suffering. “I thought so last night when you came home. I don't think any thing but being very sick would keep you from saying your prayers and going to church.”

“Were you awake when I came to bed? You did not speak.”

“No; because I thought perhaps you would be saying your prayers, after you lay down, and I should disturb you. I’m so sorry you can’t go. I wonder if I shall ever go again! it seems so long. Does the pretty little girl that sits in the corner come this cold weather? and the lame woman with the brown bonnet? She always speaks so nicely to me; when I don’t even know her name. Isn’t it funny. I should like to hear ‘We praise Thee, O God!’ once more. It always sounds so grand, and rolls so through the church, and fills it. When I shut my eyes, it seems as if I could see them all standing on the glass sea, with their harps up in heaven; all ‘the glorious company of the apostles;’ and the holy martyrs and the prophets, just as it says. I wonder if it is wicked to care so much more about the singing than I do about the sermon, sister? Which do you go to church for most?”

Ay! what, indeed, did she go to church for? Why was she staying away? What had checked even her prayers? It was the tumult of her soul which she could not quell—the doubts of God’s love and kindness to her—the miserable murmurs at her lot—the sullen defiance of His rule over

her—and the resolve to walk by the light of her own human will and inclination. It was unjust that she should be always suffering for others; denied love, when it was wasted on one who already had every other gift in lavish profusion! She stood in a great strait, and there was no one to counsel her. Her father would not understand it all, and was indeed so self-absorbed that he could not enter into the difficulties that surrounded her; no one could, for no one knew the extent of the sacrifice which conscience demanded.

What did she go to church for? Was it not to seek the very help and guidance which she so much needed? And this simple childish question gave her the clue to the labyrinth of temptations by which she was surrounded.

“I think I will go, after all”—and she began her simple toilette; “I may feel better after I am in the air.”

Again the temptation whispered: “What good will it do you? You can say your prayers as well, or better, at home.”

But she was roused to see the first wilful erring from the straight path of duty, and though she

did not know how it could avail her, she would take the first step towards a return.

She was not late, after all ; for the fear of being so had quickened her walk through the side streets and courts that made her most direct way to the old parish church where her mother before her had prayed ; yes, that the child then kneeling beside her, the quiet, brown-haired Margaret, might have the strength and guidance she needed, in just such trials as these which had come upon her.

The tide of fashionable church-goers was pouring into the iron gates, as she caught sight of the well-known stone coping that surmounted the wall on either side—the heavy parti-colored brick wall that screened the slumbers of the dead in that quiet old church-yard from sight, or sound of profanation ; and standing in their midst, so that the shadow of the cross on the graceful spire passed from grave to grave, as the day deepened to noon, or faded to twilight, was the honored house of prayer in which they had been baptized, and from which they were carried to their burial.

It needed no stately arches, no fretted aisles to enhance the reverence with which all who wor-

shipped there turned towards it, as to their home. It had that which wealth, however lavishly or tastefully displayed, could never give. Huge, and perhaps ungraceful in its proportions, its walls were tableted by memories of the dead who die in the Lord, chief among them the venerable patriarch, whose snow-white hair had been crowned with many a glory from the square chancel window, as he ministered before it to those his hands had signed as lambs of the flock, in their infancy, at its font, and were sent forth by him, in later life, as "servants and soldiers" of the cross. Heavy wreaths of ivy, bearing witness to its age, crept everywhere, garlanding its walls, and essaying even to drape the spire itself, with its unfading freshness, or stooping to trail o'er some moss-grown memorial stone that marked the last resting-place of one who had seen the foundation laid, and this witness to the zeal and piety of our forefathers rise to its completion. The close turf had scarcely lost its freshness, and overhead swung the heavy, drooping branches of the old willows, that ranged with statelier trees, and were the first to send a thrill of the spring's green gladness into the close dull heart of the city.

There are not many such monuments to the goodness of God to his people *from generation unto generation*, in this age of rapid growth and unsparing change; thrice hallowed and venerated be those that remain. Bonds like these drew many of its worshippers from their far-off homes in more fashionable quarters, unheard of when the substantial dwelling-places around it were in their prime. It was thus that its congregation united strange contrasts, now that the homes of the poor and lowly had crept up to the very boundaries on one side, while on the other fashion still lingered, and the call to daily prayer reached even to the shock and turmoil of business life, the great commercial centre of the city. It was a house of prayer for all people, one of the few in which "the rich and the poor meet together" to acknowledge that "the Lord is the maker of them all."

Margaret stood aside on the broad stone flagging for a moment, to let the children of the Sunday-School pass with their teachers—a quiet little train of bright and thoughtful faces, chiefly gathered among those who had few other opportunities of instruction; while the teachers entered on their self-denying ministry from all classes of the

congregation. Overhead the chimes were singing through the morning air a glad triumphant strain ; and as Margaret listened, and looked, thoughts of her own childhood came with softening memories. She had once made one of the little procession, as Susie now longed to do. How well she could remember looking out eagerly, as she crossed the churchyard, to catch a glimpse of her mother's loving smile, and claim her hand as they passed up the dusky gallery stairs to their own seat, just as she ascended them this morning, and knelt in that very place, kept through all the changes of years, because it had been her mother's. She could not pray, even here ; only a wild, lonely yearning for help and hope filled all her soul as she rose and waited for the service to commence.

Susie's old friend, the lame woman in the brown bonnet, was already there, in the opposite corner of the square pew, her prayer-book opened, and her spectacles laid across the page, to be ready when the voluntary should cease. From below came the clatter of children's feet as the boys of the school crossed the marble pavement of the chancel to take their places in the opposite gallery. Margaret looked down to the chancel, with its

warm, crimson draperies, to the window through which poured a softened light; but it was not this which attracted her. She tried to turn away, tried not to see what she knew would only add to her disquiet, "but looked, nevertheless."

The high square pews, with their original ample space and comfortable furnishing, were occupied chiefly by family groups, each a picture in itself. There were fathers with snow-white hair—dignified matrons with the uneasy little ones of the second generation at their side; while young men and maidens had come up through the good old paths in which their childish steps had been guided to join in prayer and psalm.

Margaret saw the family she sought for in their accustomed places, all but one; and, as she looked again, he came in, and stood uncovered, with bowed head and thoughtful, reverent face; not as one who conforms only to an outward custom; every deed of Lewis Churchill's life attested that he worshipped "in spirit and in truth." With Margaret's strong devotional feelings, this had strengthened the confidence and respect with which only she had first regarded him; and it was still the highest, purest element in what she

had come to know was "inordinate and sinful affection," since he was now bound to another. Weak and unmaidenly it might have been before; but now it was to be resisted as sin. Should she ever conquer it?—looking for his face day after day, as the sick and the prisoner watch for the sunshine, thrilling to her very heart at the sound of his voice, starting at his step, however distant; but no—not while in his daily presence. How quietly happy they all seemed in each other! Mr. Churchill looking round upon them with pardonable pride—his wife anxious for Agnes' comfort, as if she had been still an invalid—Kate checking the bright glances and dimpling smiles of her merry face with the remembrance of the presence they had come up to seek. She saw it all, even the thanks of Agnes, as her brother moved the footstool at his mother's signal, and marked the psalms for the day. Why had God set them in an Eden of affection and content, leaving her a famished beggar at the gate? Strive as she would, her mind wandered back to this. Through the prayerful, hopeful words of the psalm, through the solemn petitions of the litany, nothing reached her dull and heavy heart until the

prayer especially appointed for the day put into her very lips the cry that had striven vainly for utterance :—

“ With great might succor us ! that, whereas through our sins and wickedness we are *sore let and hindered* in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful mercy may speedily help and deliver us.”

A soft mist, as of a coming fruitful shower, gathered in her hot and tearless eyes, as she rose from her knees ; but, though she could not see the page before her, she heard the clear, deep voice of their pastor in the lesson that followed :—

“ Be careful for nothing ; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, *which passeth all understanding, shall* keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

But no, this gentle counsel, this loving promise were not for her. Thanksgiving she could not offer ; peace she could not hope for. The prayer suited her best ; and she said over to herself : “ Through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered.” She remembered, when the noble face

and figure of their rector appeared in the high, old-fashioned pulpit, so near that his eyes seemed to seek her, as he looked around upon his people, that the sermon was the last of the Advent lectures, in which God's people had been called upon from Sunday to Sunday to rise and shake off the sloth and coldness which had gathered about them through a year of prosperity and pleasure. It was as it had been a trumpet call in its earnest solemnity to self-conviction and self-dēnial, even to the right hand or the right eye. Secret faults, subtle besetting sins, darling self-indulgences—all these stumbling-blocks in the King's highway, were to be set aside, that "the rough places might be made straight, and the crooked places plain." This was not the comfort and help Margaret had longed for. She had asked for a draught of oblivion ; and a sharp searching knife probed the wound instead. It had left her without excuse ; but she only felt more hopeless and despairing as she rose to leave the church. The living tide thronged outward through the aisles, and downward from the galleries above. There was a crush in the vestibule, where the two currents met ; a pause, filled by nods of recognition, and fragmen-

tary comments or questions, among kinsfolk and acquaintance, on the sermon, the weather, and—shall we record it?—still more indifferent topics; but all in that hushed church-going whisper which still preserves the outward decency demanded by the day and the place itself. It seemed strange to Margaret, battling with the solemn call she had listened to, to hear such words as these:—

“Out, after all! My dear, your new bonnet is lovely.”

“Pretty woman, Miss ——, if you can catch a glimpse of her. She sat with the ——s.”

“Cold for the season, though. We shall have an old-fashioned winter, I imagine. Better go home and dine with us.”

“All such miserable sinners? No, my dear madam; don't set yourself and myself down among the ignoble crowd. Don't you think the sermon was rather long?”

While she wondered that even these gay triflers could so soon put aside the earnest words of a faithful pastor, or watched the thoughtful stillness of many more faces that flowed past, beneath her, as she stood arrested midway in her descent, some one, pressing close to her, said: “Ah, if we

laid such words to heart! If the Advent warning was only listened to as it should be!" And she turned to find Miss Churchill and her brother. He was bending down to his sister as she spoke; but when he raised his head they stood face to face, and pressed so closely in the throng, as she stepped down quickly with the instinct of avoidance, that for a moment his arm supported her; and she could almost hear the strong, measured beating of his heart. It was doubtless the surprise of meeting her there so suddenly—it had never chanced before; though sometimes she had had a distant greeting—which called such a sudden light into his face.

"Margaret!" And he put out his hand, this time undenied.

Only for one moment! He had called her "Margaret," too! It was part of her old self-deception. But the dying are allowed farewells; and she suffered him to take her hand into the warm grasp of a friend, not the distant, ceremonious touch of civility to an inferior. She felt his breath upon her cheek, met his glance with one that said she knew not what! nothing that she need blush for! a friend—he had shown himself

her friend—might know that his compassion was not wasted.

Then the crowd swept over the time-worn threshold, and separated them. That was as it should be. Henceforth, they were to go separate ways; she knew it now; that touch—it thrilled her yet—had given her “knowledge of the good and evil” in her own heart. She must not trifle longer; she must not linger in the way of temptation.

CHAPTER XV.

SUNDAY was always one of Margaret's trial days. At other times, she could escape the sight at least of the ill-regulated, noisy household; and, as is usually the case where there is no family rule, self-indulgence and its consequent evils reigned paramount on this day of all others.

Margaret still held to her own mother's teaching, quaintly expressed by Ruth's homely proverb, "Never clip the wings of the Sabbath." But Mrs. Grant put "idle" for "holy" in her reading of the Fourth Commandment, and observed it to the letter. Church-bells were her signal for rising; and the remains of breakfast, which it was Margaret's business to prepare, usually stood on the table on her return from morning service, the children undergoing their weekly ablutions in the mean time; or, if they escaped out of doors before

their mother seized upon them for the dreaded ceremony, this duty also fell upon their elder sister, or Susie, when she was the little maid of all work.

There were two hours, at least, of hurry and confusion at noon, of teasing, or quarrelling between the boys, and sharply administered rebukes of tongue and hand from their mother, in the pauses of making her own elaborate toilet for the afternoon's neighborly visiting. Her husband always passed it in long strolls on the outskirts of the city, ending in the vicinity of some railroad depot, where he could meditate at leisure on his own premeditated improvements in machinery. Time had been when he too attended service regularly; but his desultory habits, and failing health, his shabby dress, and the whole gradual lowering of moral tone, had broken in upon higher duties; though he had ever kept aloof from the uncongenial society of the low and vicious around him.

The purple satin hat was displayed conspicuously upon the bed in the adjoining sleeping-room, when Margaret entered the house, and Mrs. Grant was arrayed in a shot silk of orange and

blue, the remains of her wedding finery. Dinner was hurried; the boys being allowed to come to the table just as they had risen; although the baby had on a clean dress, and sat up on the floor quite peaceably, employed with a bone from the dinner-table, which did not in the end improve his personal appearance.

Mrs. Grant's anxiety as to the weather, and the state of "the walking," was followed by the modest request that Margaret would administer the required quantity of soap and water to the faces of the boys, and look up their clean clothes.

"Dear knows, it's seldom enough *I* go out of the house, with all I have to do!" she said, in the whining voice which always grated more uncomfortably on Margaret's ears than her loudest wrath. "*Everybody else* can dress themselves up and parade the streets but me. Here I must stay and slave in this kitchen, just because *some people* are put up to think themselves too sick to work, and other people allow them in their laziness. It's all very well to say I shall be made a lady of some day. I've heard that a great many times. I should like to *see* some of the money a little closer."

Yet, for all this expressed unbelief, Mrs. Grant's

special errand abroad that day, next to displaying her new bonnet, was to astonish her acquaintances with the information that her husband had made a fortune, and they were going to move up into Second, or South, as soon as their quarter was up.

“Never *wās* such boys!”—and she sat Master Al violently down in his chair—“chasing all ’round the neighborhood, instead of staying home to be washed and dressed decently. But when should I get time to do it, any way, with every step to take for myself, and sick people to wait on into the bargain! Dear knows! if *I* could have my time to myself, and work at my trade, I wouldn’t be beholden to the best man living for victuals and clothes; but some people have every thing just as they say, and I must put up with it, and be ground down, and walked over!”

It was hard to sit still and bear these stings of the tongue, unjust as they were; but harder still for Margaret to see her father push away his scarcely tasted dinner, and leave the house to find quiet, at least, abroad. She was glad to do any thing that could hasten Mrs. Grant’s departure, and breathed more freely when that lady set forth, arrayed in a gay shawl, crowned by the splendor

of the new bonnet, and carrying the baby with her, his face looking out from under a *compound* white satin hat, with a marvellous plume! Left to herself, the boys gave little trouble comparatively, although they declined her invitation to stay and "play at Sunday-School" after they were dressed—her only successful method of reaching them.

Ruth's kindly face appeared just as this was accomplished, on her way to afternoon service.

"Susie not down stairs yet?" she said, in her cheery voice. "But I guess she's just as well off where she is, for a week or so yet; keep her in bed as long as you can. I don't suppose you'll leave her this afternoon again, but I thought I'd just step round and see. Bless me, just look at the child!"

Margaret started, as well as her visitor, to see the apparition at the foot of the stairs. It was very imprudent, but very natural on Susie's part. She thought Margaret never would get through, and, wrapping a shawl around her, slipped out of bed, and down stairs, at the risk of being carried immediately back again.

"How natural it does look, clock and all!"—

said Susie, sitting on the lower stair, gazing around with visible satisfaction. "I'm so tired of our room!"

"You'll please go back to it as fast as you can, though, you crazy little thing! Don't wait a minute now—"

"But, sister—"

"Not a word till you're in bed again! Ruth will come up; won't you, Ruth?" And Miss Susie found herself deposited up stairs before she had a chance to make even a feint of resistance. Ruth sat down in the sewing-chair, while Margaret made the little invalid's toilet, the child being all excitement at this partial escape.

"Shoes and stockings, and a dress. Oh, please Margaret, a real dress! not a clean nightgown, and that hateful sack! Though it's a very nice sack, and I don't know what I should have done without it; only I'm so tired of it now. That's real good!"—and Susie stood on tiptoe to see herself in the glass over Margaret's dressing-table, but turned away with a rueful look.

"Oh, dear! I'm just like a boy! Oh, I didn't think I looked so queer! What made you cut my hair so close? What am I going to do?"

“Do? Why, nothing; let it grow,” said Ruth complacently. “Guess you wouldn’t have had much of it left if I hadn’t cut it off, or much of yourself, either. Hold still, and let Margaret part it. There! frizzle up the ends a little. There! She does make a first-rate boy; doesn’t she, Margaret? Little peaked yet.”

Susie’s spirits were beyond her strength, though, and she was soon very glad of the easy-chair Ruth had arranged in her primitive way, and to lie quietly in it, an odd old-fashioned little figure, holding a clean pocket handkerchief tightly in her almost transparent hands.

Ruth found it was time to leave them, when she had seen her fairly settled, and paid a visit to Margaret’s mirror on her own account, not from any vanity, but force of habit, and exactness; for Ruth liked to pin her shawl at just such an angle across her plump figure, and always gave a parting bend to her black Leghorn bonnet before she went into the street.

“I suppose Miss Agnes hasn’t been in to see you again,” she said, turning this way and that in the vain attempt to see the back of her head. “It’s hardly time yet, though; and I suppose she’s

pretty busy, too. Well, good-by, children; I shall run in to wish you a merry-Christmas, in the course of the week, and to see Susie's new frock on. I suppose it's to be done by then. Don't come down to the door, Margaret! I guess I can find my way out by this time."

They were all alone again—the house to themselves, in Sabbath stillness and quiet. Susie could not resist castle-building.

"Isn't it beautiful to be all alone so? Oh, sister! don't you wish we could be, all the time? Just suppose this was our house, and we could have Ruth, or any one we liked, come to take tea and spend the evening, and have custard for supper, or sponge cake, and a fire in the other room. I don't think it's nice to have people sitting around while dishes are being washed, and to have to ask them to move when we sweep up. We'll have two rooms, any way; won't we?"

"But what would become of father then?"

Susie's countenance fell. "That's the only thing that troubles me, when we're living all alone. When I'm playing so, you know. I should like to have father always; and I think he would work as he used to, if he had a nice warm room,

and sit with us evenings, and read; don't you? I wonder if I ought to wish to have the boys too! But I can't, yet; though I may, some day, when they don't tease me so."

"Well," said Margaret, "I suppose that we might be doing better to-day, at all events, than turning the boys out of house and home. You haven't told me yet what you did all the morning. Oh! did Ruth tell you Miss Agnes' last name? I meant to have asked her. Perhaps it's some one that used to go to Sunday-School when I did."

"No, I forgot. We always have so many things to say when we begin to talk about *her*. I do hope she will come again. *She* could come and take tea with us, perhaps, if it was all our house. How nice it would be to hear her and you talk together! I shouldn't want to say a word."

It was not Susie's unknown friend, but Adelaide Long, who rose before Margaret while Susie rambled on. But she claimed a truce with her own heart for the time. She must be all alone with her God; not even the child for a witness to that final conflict.

“But what did you do while I was gone to church, dear?”

“Oh, I was going to tell you! I read the Psalms, and the Lessons, and then I found my text in the Bible and learned it. I think it such a nice plan to say my text to you every night, and I read so many little bits before I find it! How many sick people and blind people Jesus cured; didn't he? I learned a verse in Romans to-day, where all the short ones are.”

Margaret looked for the well-known chapter in the Bible she had taken from her dressing-table, while Susie folded her hands, as she had said her prayers in babyhood, and repeated—

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves; but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.’ I learned that to put me in mind not to talk back, or be ugly when I go down stairs again. I knew I shouldn't do it, ever,” added the child, in a penitent tone.

But Margaret had gone on to the end of the chapter, wondering if the message had not come to her instead of Susie.

She remembered the simple direction she had

so often relied on in darkness and doubt: "If any lack wisdom, let him ask of God." She had asked it all that day, and what direction had she received? To give up all that led to temptation, though dear as her own right hand; to leave retribution to one who knew all, and could make her innocence clear as the noonday. Self-conquest, at any sacrifice, was before her, and the first step was to turn away from every association that had nourished her foolish dream, or that could lead her into temptation of cherishing unavailing murmurs at her lot. She must give up her place to do this; and it must be done at once. It involved all her dependence; she had no other resource, no friend to secure another situation. Could it be duty? and the thought of Susie turning to her for every little comfort or pleasure, and her father absolutely in need of her aid. Of a truth the right hand and the right eye was required of her.

But might she not, at least, free herself from this humbling suspicion before she left? Would it be more than simple justice, such as another might demand of her; for, if she gave no explanation—and what could she give?—the very act

would be held as proof of her guilt. Mr. Church-ill might doubt it now, at times—as to-day, it had seemed forgotten—even he could then hold her guilt as certain. And yet she read again, and the words burned themselves upon her memory: “Avenge not yourselves; if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” And was not concealment the meat and drink her enemy had need of!

Poor girl! The strength to make this utter self-renunciation could come alone from the hand that required it; and while Susie, wearied by unusual exertion, slept lightly in the comfortable chair, Margaret knelt and prayed as she had not done for many a day, with wrung, outstretched hands, and bitterness of heart that none but God could know.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE like of Christmas week in Philadelphia is not to be found in any city in our land. The German element in its population has overcome the little of Puritan prejudice to this most cheerful and Christian festival which may have been infused in early times, and even the straightness of "yearly meeting" councils has in these later generations enlarged itself to some degree of participation in the general gayety.

New York stands divided as to its holidays, the New Year claiming precedence with some, while others have nearly finished their merry-making when it arrives. But in Philadelphia old and young unite by general consent to give chief honor to "Father Christmas."

There are many, it is true, who still hold it only in its social aspect, and have quite forgotten

the "gold, and frankincense, and myrrh," those first Christmas offerings, that have hallowed the tokens of peace and good-will which we now exchange. But the gift-making, on what foundation soever it may be placed, is as universal as the feasting, and the whole city is given up to a week's festivity—festal in its cheerful streets, with their brilliant holiday array; in its bountiful and bustling markets—all its days are "market days"—in choice and abundance, and in the brightened houses, where the poorest twine Christmas wreaths, and the least expectant child watches for the coming of Santa Claus.

Unfortunately, the weather seems to hold to the musical direction—"prepare for harmony by discords"—and usually commences by a light fall of snow, just sufficient to combine with the dust, and soaking rain, its general termination, into almost impossible crossings, and detestable walking generally. Not that this at all interferes with the week's engagements: bonnets and cloaks that have been carefully housed for fine days all winter are submitted recklessly to the frail defence of umbrellas; omnibuses are crowded and steaming; while carriage-horses, whose con-

stitutions are usually regarded with excessive tenderness by their owners, stand for hours, draggled and forlorn, before the principal shops. It is strange that all this exposure seldom produces any ill effect—"no one takes cold at Christmas time;"—the internal glow and excitement are equal to the most impenetrable Mackintosh.

It is true that all this shopping is not "wisely sped;" that people will go beyond their means, led on by ostentation, caprice, or pure benevolence; but somebody is the gainer for it, and there must be excess in all effervescence of spirits, whether individual or social; and the year's crust of selfishness is very apt to be lessened, or disappear altogether for the time being.

The Christmas week of which we write did no discredit to its predecessors. The shops and markets put on their most tempting aspects, the weather its most deplorable one. Overhead sombre skies, dripping moisture everywhere around, penetrating the garments of those who went abroad, and even the houses. Monday was its only day of sunshine, and those who were wise availed themselves of it; but by far the greater portion of the community "put off" out-of-door

expeditions in the face of many such yearly reverses of the weather.

Mrs. Churchill did not share in this monomania for deferring necessary purchases until the best of the markets was exhausted, and the press of customers at Henrion's or Tyndale's became so great that shoppers were kept hours watching for even a place at the counter, while their horses suffered outside as aforesaid, and their husbands waited dinner in vain, in the hope of having the light of their countenances behind the soup-tureen.

For a whole week past, mysterious conferences with "father" had been going on, and their results stored away in the capacious depths of her own dressing-bureau drawers. Mr. Churchill delighted in such errands—in lingering over the glass cases at Bailey's, and wishing that he had more children still unsupplied with watches, or ready for tea equipages—in snuffing the foreign odor of the great camphor chests in the shawl-department of his son's establishment, and wondering who could be presented, with propriety, one of those undoubted cashmeres. Every clerk at Tyndale's welcomed the approach of his benevo-

lent face and gold-headed cane, certain of one customer who had not come "just to look this time, and would call again in a few days;" or beat down the prices of delicate French importations to the homelier demand for stout Staffordshire potteries.

These Christmas errands Mrs. Churchill was content to have executed for her, assured that they would be done in the most tasteful and liberal manner, for there was Agnes to assist in choosing Kate's present, and Kate for Agnes, when it fell quite out of "father's" way. But the filling of store-room and meat-safe she superintended personally. She could not trust even her husband in so nice a matter as the choice of beef and poultry for this occasion—or perhaps, to speak the more literal truth, she could not forego the pleasure of seeing the generous provision in market for the wants of householders like herself—of examining Bucks county fowls, tasting golden butter prints, seeing the fresh eggs counted down like so many monstrous pearls, and passing the cheerful compliments of the season with tradespeople she had known for twenty years or more, whose daily customer she had been in times that she still sighed

for, when it was the fashion for all housekeepers to go to market themselves. She loved the very sight of the market-houses, with their piled-up wreaths of evergreens, their goodly forests of Christmas-trees and gay branches of scarlet berries. There was a genuine satisfaction in the purchase of cheap toys (chiefly for the families of her married servants, whom she never lost sight of), and buttons, and thread and needles for those now in her employ, from the transient stalls at the entrance. She would have exhausted the entire stock if she could have thought of enough people to bestow it upon properly, and as it was, seldom left any great supply behind her. There were no forbidden "greetings in the market-places," but "God speeds" in their kindest sense, and many a poor widow felt the more certain of a good week's business from the cheerful salutation of this best of women.

At the breakfast-table, then, Mrs. Churchill made her appearance, fresh and rosy, from an early expedition, and presently John and his appetising burden arrived also; the covers of both well-laden baskets upheaved by the protruding legs of

poultry, while any imaginable addition to good cheer was safely bestowed in their depths.

Kate knotted the cord of her pretty dressing-gown with a little shiver.

“No peace to the house now for a week! I should go without turkey and chicken-pie till another Christmas, before I should turn out of a comfortable bed so early in the morning, and go wading through those dirty markets!”

“You don't know *what* you will do till you get a house of your own,” remarked her mother reprovingly, for Kate's lack of house-keeping taste was a sore trial in that quarter. “I've heard girls talk just so before, and make splendid housekeepers when they were once settled down. Besides, my dear, *our* markets are *not* dirty. I beg you will not say that again. All Philadelphians should be proud of them. You should see those miserable little stores they depend upon in *some* places I could name, and even their markets more like great stables—”

“Or shambles,” suggested Lewis, mischievously.

“Than a respectable market;” concluded Mrs. Churchill, gravely.

“What’s the first thing on the programme?” said her husband, helping himself, for the fifth time, to flannel-cakes. “Who’s going down town with me?”

“Oh, it’s quite too early for shopping! that is to say, unless you need the girls very much. I shall want them both, if this afternoon will do just as well.”

“Those everlasting plum-puddings! Oh, Agnes!” And Kate put on a pretty air of consternation.

“It isn’t often I call upon you, my dear, I’m sure,” said her mother, with a little pique in her tone. “Agnes is usually so kind and considerate. I should think that once a year you might assist us a little.”

“Where’s the cook?” inquired papa, with a dread of seeing his favorite’s face clouded, and an inward desire for her gay companionship for his morning’s walk.

“It’s Monday, father. You don’t seem to recollect; and, though we give most of our washing out, there’s always enough to keep the girls pretty busy, as I often have to explain to Kate. It’s the

last week in the year to have things put off, or broken in upon."

For once in her life, Mrs. Churchill showed a degree of valiant determination, and carried the day. "Father" was obliged to accept the escort of Lewis, and Miss Kate to resign herself to domestic trials, though she absorbed herself lazily in in the "North American" while the table was cleared; and Agnes and her mother washed up the silver and china, an established habit in the family, the little cedar tub, the soap tray, and its concomitants making their appearance as regularly as breakfast itself.

This was Mrs. Churchill's time for settling all her little housekeeping matters, not allowing them to obtrude their unwelcome faces with unanswerable demands upon her time and attention later in the day. From the dining-room to the store-closet, and thence to the kitchen, was her regular round. After which, the chambermaid was drilled and reviewed, the linen-closet put to rights; and then, as she expressed it, "her mind was free for anything that might turn up."

But to-day, Agnes was invited to accompany her to the store-room, and assist in the weighing

out of certain of its contents. Mrs. Churchill's store-room was a goodly sight, with its well-filled bins of sugars and rice, its bags of coffee, chests of tea, barrels of all the flours that could be compounded into the staff of life—extra Genesee, unbolted Graham, Buckwheat and Indian-meal standing conspicuous. The shelves rivalled the corner grocers' in their array—the flasks of pure Florentine oil, the rank and file of English mustard and sauce bottles—and surpassed them in rows upon rows of labelled jelly and sweetmeat glasses, brandied fruit, and those blue Canton jars, with their cordage net-work, so welcome to lovers of foreign confections. It was well that there were no school-boys to be tempted by a glimpse into this paradise, for the cake-boxes presented a never-failing supply in addition.

Mrs. Churchill called upon John to carry the store-room scales to the now empty side-table before Miss Kate, and weighed, with her own hands, the mysterious compounds that enter into that crowning dish of an old-fashioned Christmas-dinner, a plum-pudding, which, we grieve to say, is passing out of sight in this dyspeptic day and generation. Suet, raisins, currants, spices, citron,

rose-water, and divers other ingredients soon gathered about Mrs. Churchill, whose spirits rose with the genial employment, till the lexcitement, as was usual with her, vented itself in a little flow of conversation, including all about her: "It's high time, my dear, that you put up your paper. Kate, my love, do you hear? Which will you do, currants or raisins? You had better both commence upon the raisins. John, take them to cook, and tell her to wash them carefully."

"He's forgotten the currants, too." And Kate caught up the dish to walk after him.

"Oh, my dear, no! I could not depend upon cook in the least for the currants. *My mother* always said there never was a cook yet that could be trusted with fruit; and we used twice as much, in old times. John, bring me a large pail of fresh water; it takes so much, Agnes; well, you may do it, as I *am* a little afraid of neuralgia; and it's quite a task. Six waters, recollect."

"Six waters!" said Kate, nibbling a bit of candied citron she had broken off from the mass.

"Yes, six is the rule." Mrs. Churchill looked relieved by this token of awakening interest in

her youngest daughter. "Currants are a great trial. Nobody knows that better than myself, as I've washed eight pounds for my pies and puddings every Christmas since I was your age. There, John, change that water for Miss Agnes. The second, is it? Well, this is the third now. John, ask Nancy for two of my clean gingham aprons, in the right-hand drawer. My love, you'll ruin your dressing-gown. To seed raisins, you must have a clean towel and finger-bowl to get along at all. There, take this apron, Kate; and I beg of you to be careful. One stone may spoil a pudding, as my mother used to say."

"But, mother, I thought you and papa were such plain people when you were first married," said Kate, holding up a rich, purplish cluster to the light, before falling to work with her accustomed energy, for whatever Kate Churchill really set herself to do was done heartily.

"Oh, we were, you know! but we took our Christmas dinner at home for five years; and I always went to help my mother make the puddings. She would not have known what to do without me."

“I came by the old house,” said Agnes, “the last time I went to see my scholars.”

“How out of the world it is!—Third below Lombard.”

“It was not then, I can assure you, Kate—quite as fashionable, or more so, than Arch Street is now.”

“Papa was a poor man, wasn't he, mother? Dear me! I never could marry one!”

“You might do much worse, my dear.”

“Oh, but the having to do without things, and to live in a little narrow street, and keep one maid, and be dragging with children all day!”

“I had no nurse-maid for Agnes and Lewis, though. It was not customary to keep so many servants, though their wages were nothing to what we pay now. Besides, we could not afford it; but I would do the same thing over again for your father. Even when Lewis had his broken arm, and Agnes the scarlet fever at the same time, and no one to depend on but myself, I never said I was sorry, and never felt so. There, now you can spread those currants on the tray, Agnes, and set them over the register. John, take away those things. Now we can settle ourselves to

work comfortably, though I'm afraid my eyesight, even with my spectacles, isn't good enough for currants. I think I will change with you altogether, Agnes, if you take up eight or ten at once on a napkin, and rub them gently. There, that's it!"

"But did you have to work so hard, really?" said Kate, going back to the phase in her mother's life which her ease-loving nature could never quite comprehend as a happy one. "I should have thought grandfather would have helped you."

"Oh, he did make us some very handsome presents, handsome for those days; but he said, from the first, that, if I chose to marry your father, I must abide by my choice, and take the brunt of it. I remember my Uncle Jacob's wife, Aunt Jacob we used to call her, as there were two Aunt Marys. Well, she said, one day, she was quite offended by the match, because she thought it lowered the family somehow, though I never dared to let your father know it. She said: 'I never should have thought you would have allowed one of your daughters to marry a man who was not a *gentleman*.'

"What makes a gentleman?" said my father.

I can see him rap his shell snuff-box now, and look up at her out of the corner of his eye.

“‘Oh, money!’ said she, ‘to be sure!’

“‘Well, then,’ said my father, ‘I’ll make a gentleman of him some day, if he doesn’t make himself one first.’ That was very good, wasn’t it, Agnes?”

This family anecdote was by no means quite new to the listeners; but Mrs. Churchill always told it with such visible satisfaction and pride, that it was a pleasure to listen to the thrice-told tale; though Kate darted a wicked look across the rapidly diminishing pile of fruit as she heard it approaching.

“I never cared about any of my children making wealthy matches for that reason,” added Mrs. Churchill. “Nobody could be happier than your father and I were; though I know some people pitied us, Aunt Jacob for one. We always had enough to eat and to wear; and we have been very much blessed, I must say.”

“There’s no danger of me; and Anne’s done for; as for Lewis, Josephine will have enough.”

“I heard on Saturday—that reminds me,” said

Agnes—"that Morton Sargeant was addressing her."

"There's not a bit of truth in it," said Kate, hotly. "He was at the concert the other night. I depend on having her for a sister; and I just wish Lewis would hurry up the wedding. Only think, I've never been bridesmaid yet!"

"Yes, I'm very much afraid that house next to Anne's will be rented. What does he say about it, Agnes?"

Agnes was usually appealed to when any one desired to know the movements and opinions of her brother; but, of this impending marriage, Agnes knew no more than the rest. She hoped—she could scarcely tell why—that something would interfere with it even yet.

An unusual silence settled on the whole group, each of them privately speculating on the probable course of events.

"Oh dear!" groaned Kate, presently, "I believe there's no end to these raisins; and Agnes gets on at the rate of a currant a minute. Can't I cut up the citron or beat the eggs?"

"Eighteen eggs would be rather too much for you, my dear; but you may cut up the citron, if

you like. Dear me, Agnes, I had quite forgotten the bread-crumbs ! It seems to me as if my memory gets worse and worse. You may grate the bread, Kate. Yes, you'd better do it at once ; and then I think Agnes and I can manage the rest ; can't we, Agnes ? ” said Mrs. Churchill, reluctantly. “ I suppose you ought to have your walk this morning, as we are going out after dinner, and do go round by Anne's, and see how Charley is. I'm afraid I sha'n't have a moment to-day.”

But Kate's release was nearer still, for John made his appearance the next moment to announce visitors, and their reception and entertainment were much more to her taste than even the bread-crumbs ; while Agnes passed quietly through the double duty, and remained at her post until the final incorporation of eggs, cream, suet, fruit, and minor ingredients, which crowning operation Mrs. Churchill would by no means delegate even to her.

CHAPTER XVII.

“KATE isn’t here?” questioned Josephine Wright, as she opened the door of Mrs. Anne Parker’s snug little sewing-room: “may I come in?”

“Oh, certainly;” and Mrs. Parker, the married sister of the Churchills, made way for her visitor to advance, through the confusion of furniture and toys which Master Charley had created.

The young gentleman himself, the most prominent member of the Parker family, eyed the newcomer with more indifference than curiosity, and returned to the tin dray, which he was industriously loading with his father’s chess-men.

“You have come to take tea with us, I hope,” said Mrs. Parker, who resembled her mother in all things, especially in her hospitable spirit. “Let me take your furs; or, will you go up to my

room and lay off your things? There, Charley, not *quite* so much noise!"

"Oh, no indeed!" Miss Wright could not possibly have made up her mind to have such a humdrum proceeding as a domestic *tête-à-tête* tea, and laid her hand upon the muff which her hostess essayed to take.

"Do, now; we shall be quite alone, and Charley's papa will be delighted to find you here, I am sure!" Mrs. Parker remembered, with satisfaction, that there were to be hot biscuit and oysters for supper, at all events, and it would not put the cook out in the least.

"I could not possibly; I have an engagement for the evening; some other time;" and Josephine mentally wondered how any one could content herself to sit in a back room all the afternoon and sew, as Mrs. Parker had been doing, with a child bothering about into the bargain.

"I expected to find Kate waiting for me; she promised to be here at five, and I have the carriage; I was to call for her. It is a quarter past now."

"She will be here very soon, then; she

usually comes round every day for a romp with Charley."

Mrs. Parker turned to that young gentleman, and held out her hand. *She* wondered, in turn, how any one could resist those bright black eyes, and round white shoulders, set off by his plaid frock and low-necked linen apron. Mrs. Parker pitied her unmarried friends sincerely, and wished that every one could have just such a good husband and lovely child as she had. As for married people who did not like children, or wish for them, they were monsters, in her eyes, "most tolerable and not to be endured!"

"You see I came right up," said Miss Wright, with the air of a privileged person. "The waiter girl"—a tautology peculiar to Miss Josephine's Philadelphia education—"told me you were here, and I would not wait in the parlor, it seemed so formal somehow, Kate and I are so intimate."

"Oh, it was quite right;" and Mrs. Parker, who was of a social nature herself, really felt pleased at this advance on the part of Kate's stylish friend, especially as she had heard some hints from mamma of the family expectations. "I hope you will never make a stranger of me. Won't

you come and see the pretty lady, Charley? Who is it, dear—your Aunt Katie?”

Children have an instinctive appreciation of character, so far as they themselves are concerned, and though Miss Wright held out her well-gloved hand, and seconded his mother's invitation, Master Charley declined.

“He's so interested just now about Christmas,” said Mrs. Parker, whose range of conversational topics was limited, and as she could find none more agreeable to herself, fell into the common mistake of supposing that it would be equally entertaining to her guest. “Charley! who comes down chimney with all sorts of pretty things? (You wouldn't suppose now that he would remember about it; his father told him.) Come, tell the lady, Charley!”

“Santa Claus!” said Master Charley, thus adjured. “He bring Tarlie itty back wow.”

“He means a little black dog,” interpreted Mrs. Parker. “He's quite crazy about it, and I was all the morning hunting for one of those curly ones—don't you know the kind?—with long ears; a toy dog, of course, I mean. It seemed as if everybody I knew was out. I could find plenty

of them,—the dogs I mean,—white ones, but no black. I wanted to see Kate to tell her to look too. I shall be terribly disappointed if I don't find one, as he has set his heart on it, and so will Charley's papa."

"Tarlie's putty tat yun up er tair!" shouted the miniature drayman, on the floor, proud of his last accomplishment, sentence making, although his efforts so far were confined to the two we have recorded.

"He means Charley's pussy cat ran up stairs," interposed the delighted mother. "It was his first sentence, and we were very proud of it, I assure you. I was standing by the back parlor door, and he was playing with the cat in the hall, who got away from him, and ran up to my room. I never was more astonished in my life than I was to hear him say it. His father would hardly believe me when he came home and I told him of it; but he said it again, and has never forgotten it since."

An audible peal of the door-bell interrupted this maternal eloquence, although Mrs. Parker called her visitor's attention to the "cunning way" in which Charley put up his little fat hand, and

said "hart!" in a low voice. It was evidently hard work to restrain herself from catching him up and kissing him in an ecstasy, for Charley was no exception to the general run of juveniles, and usually declined pertinaciously all entreaties to "show off" before company.

"I think that must be Kate"—and Miss Wright tried not to look too much relieved by the arrival. It was now quite dark out of doors, and the gas had been lighted some time.

"No; it's not Kate's step, it's a gentleman, and Mr. Parker never gets home before six. Who can it be?"

Miss Wright's heart took up a quick-step, as a firm tread passed through the hall, and some one sprang up the half flight of stairs, evidently a privileged intruder.

"Oh, to be sure it's Lewis, he often comes round on his way from the store; sit still, we never mind him; and he's so fond of a romp with Charley."

Miss Wright obeyed the injunction, and remained very quietly in her dark corner, with her face turned from the shaded light; but she watched the door eagerly, for this was better than her

hopes. She had thought he might accompany Kate; but what if Kate should not come at all, and common politeness would make her offer of setting him down, as she passed the house, a necessity, and his declining an impossibility?

“Hurrah, young gentleman!” And Master Charley was caught up, and tossed within an inch of the ceiling before he could steer himself around to see who had arrived. “How are you, Anne? Now, sir, where’s a kiss for your uncle?”

Miss Wright, looking on, thought “He’s very fine-looking, after all, if he is so solemn usually. What a tall, nice figure! I had no idea he could romp so.”

“You don’t seem to see Miss Wright, Lewis,” said Mrs. Parker, always regardful of propriety.

“Oh, Miss Josephine, I beg your pardon!” And he bowed towards her, his hands being encumbered by Charley and Charley’s dray at the moment. “I did not know Kate was here.”

“But she is not,” said Mrs. Parker; “that’s the very thing. Miss Wright has been waiting here until I’m sure she must be quite tired out.”

“Oh, not at all, Mrs. Parker!”

“Well, it’s very careless in Kate; and I shall

certainly tell her so. I have been trying to persuade Miss Wright to stay to tea; but she has an engagement. Can't you, Lewis?" And Mrs. Parker thought again of the biscuit and oysters. How fortunate that she happened to order them!

Miss Wright unconsciously leaned forward to listen for the answer.

"Not to-night, thank you, Anne. I hardly think Kate will be here, either, it is so late now; she went out with mother directly after dinner. Yes, it's very careless in her to forget an appointment."

But, perhaps, having heard Lewis say at dinner that he should go round by Ashburton Place on his way home, Miss Kate's detention was like the child's torn clothes, "an accident done a-purpose." She certainly had exhibited a wicked match-making propensity from the first; though she little dreamed how near at hand the wished-for crisis lay.

"Then I had better not wait any longer." And Miss Wright rose to her feet, drawing up her Victorine.

"Oh, don't hurry! she may be here yet. Do wait a little while."

“I think not to-night”—and the lady made a step or two forward. Was it a rash move? She hazarded it at least.

Master Charley was deposited on the floor. “There, that will do for this time, my little man!”

“Oh, don’t trouble yourself, Mr. Churchill! I have the carriage.”

“Yes, Lewis, do put Miss Wright in the carriage. But you’d better both stay and spend the evening.”

Miss Wright was inexorable, though promising to come again soon, with that special object in view, to Mrs. Parker’s warm invitation, which was urged on the stairs, even on the very doorstep.

“Shall I set you down, Mr. Churchill?”

“Thank you!” Yet it was not an acceptance, for he had handed her in, and still stood on the pavement, with his hand on the door.

“I’m going directly home.”

“Yes, Lewis, I think you’d better!” called Mrs. Parker from the steps. “It’s getting quite damp, and I should not be surprised if it rained before you got home, if you walk.”

What had made Lewis Churchill hesitate?

Whatever the cause, his self-deliberation ended in calling himself a very unfriendly name, and he took the opposite seat. . So they rolled away together, quite alone, while Mrs. Parker went back to the house to superintend Charley's bread-and-milk, congratulating herself on the success of the little manoeuvre, which had thrown the lovers together, and of which she took the entire credit.

Lewis glanced at the vacant house next to Anne's as they passed, and thought what a pretty picture the sitting-room, and mother and child had been, his heart leaping up with the hope that some day such a home might be his own, when he turned to see the fair face opposite him looking all the lovelier for the glare and flash of the street lights which revealed it. The little hand nestled outside the muff, so temptingly near his, and there was a charm in the complete seclusion, the close neighborhood of the moment.

But there was another returning home, in a far-off solitary street,—Margaret, hurrying on, thankful that the day was over, and to escape from the presence of one who had cruelly wronged her, the punishment of whose sin she must unjustly bear. There was no longer a tumult of

feeling to control; she was like one who has given up all hope of averting some dreaded crisis or calamity, and waits with dull quietude, rather than calm patience, for the issue. Some one has said, and wisely: "It is not in the tempest that one walks the beach to look for the treasures of wrecked ships; but when the storm is past, we find pearls and precious stones washed ashore!" Margaret thought not of any possible future gain; she heard only the sobbing of the storm in the distance, and felt on her unsheltered head the drenching and driving spray, with a dreary dread that the waves would return again.

She found a comfortless home; her father despondent at some fresh rebuff or delay, querulous and unreasonable as a child; and Susie suffering again from her exposure on the stairs the day before. No wonder that she stood in the chill darkness of her own room, tempted to give up all hope, and drift outward with the tide.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WEDNESDAY, the day before Christmas, had arrived, and there was no more time for delay in making the purchases that were to pass from friend to friend as tokens of good-will that evening. It was no use to wait for the weather any longer; the storm, commencing on Monday night, had increased in violence through Tuesday, and now the steady down-pour was what every one might have expected, but did not. In doleful contrast to the gayety of the night before, Miss Adelaide Long arrived at Churchill & Choate's with trailing muddy garments, and a hoarse cold, to which her daily companions attributed her special ill-humor.

But Margaret alone could understand the conscience ill at ease, the restless fear of discovery, which appeared in her fretful manner and sarcas-

tic tones. Her own heart was heavy enough, but she thanked God that it had not the barbed arrow of conscious guilt. She had begun to find that

"The sting of falsehood loses half its pain,
If our hearts bear witness we are true."

Still it was hard, in the momentary pauses of that busy day, to recollect all that was before her. While others anticipated the gifts of the evening and the holiday to-morrow, she thought only of going from these familiar scenes to return to them no more; of meeting Mr. Choate's suspicious look and cold acceptance of the resignation of her post; of going away, perhaps, without a word of farewell from the kind friend whose approval she courted, to brave her father's disappointment, his wife's wrath, and Susie's innocent questionings when she told them what she had done, but could give no reason why. What was to become of them, or herself, she could not see; but when these misgivings came, she met the tempter, who would still hold her in this daily bondage, with an old saying she had often heard from her mother's lips: "Man's extremity is God's opportunity."

Fortunately, there was little leisure in the day's

incessant whirl; as Mrs. Parker had said, "everybody one knew was out." It was amusing enough, for one who was care free, to watch the meetings and greetings of friends who exchanged shrugs and "horrors!" on the weather, comments on the different establishments in which they had encountered each other previously, and inquiries as to success in some all-important search.

Every one was "tired to death," "worried out of their lives," and "ready to drop;" yet, withal, they seemed to be in excellent spirits, with plenty of money, or an unlimited *carte-blanche* as to bills. They greeted each other with "Merry Christmas," as if the day had already come, and disappeared to make room for other eager shoppers, who queried, and bargained, and abused the weather in turn. It was so dark by four in the afternoon that the gas was lighted, and still the crowd poured in and out without diminution. Mr. Choate, too busy to survey the throng—although he had two special assistants—listened with inward content and satisfaction to the ring of coin and the shouts of "cash." It was a music that his soul delighted in. Miss Choate, whose department included table and piano-covers—

favorite holiday gifts among practical people—was also forced to attend to her own share of the business, and let the “young ladies” at the other counters manage their affairs alone. Even Mr. Churchill seemed to share in the general excitement, walking about restlessly, or watching the sky, as if their sales really depended on the weather, which, on this day at least, could not influence them in the slightest.

Evening came—Christmas Eve—with all its cheerful associations; with a crowd thronging Chestnut Street, not to be disappointed in seeing Kriss Krinkle by any freaks of the weather; with startling peals from door-bells, and mysterious packages, with and without the donor’s love or compliments; shouts and clapping of hands from the youngsters as folding-doors flew open magically, revealing brilliantly-lighted and generously-laden Christmas trees—smiles and tears to those who stood by, and watched their joy while they thought of their own childhood, or noted the missing links in the chain of household love.

Eight, nine o’clock, and yet the tired feet were not released, and the lights shone out from Churchill & Choate’s over the wet, slippery pave-

ment. A long and dreary Christmas Eve it had been to Susie; disappointed in her anticipation of having the new dress finished, and wearing it for the first time to see the Christmas decorations, and hear the Christmas anthems—for Margaret did not come, and though she had been sitting up much of the day, she knew she was not strong enough to walk so far as the church on the morrow. So she turned to her usual resource, tired of starting up and listening for her sister's voice, and imagined all sorts of impossible presents for both of them, and for their father. She was even generous enough to present Mrs. Grant with a fabulous silk dress magnificent to behold, and to fill the boys' stockings, and shoes too—those impracticable shoes, that were always missing or tied in "hard knots"—with candies, and trumpets, and tin horses. Nor was old Ruth forgotten. Susie pictured Ruth's astonishment when she herself should walk in with a bird, a singing canary in a round cage, and find that it was really for her; performing which liberal bestowment, Susie fell asleep, and wandered off on still more fantastic journeys into cloud-land.

There was a time-honored custom at Churchill

& Choate's—established, one might be sure, by the original founder of the house, and not by any spasmodic generosity of Mr. Caleb's. At the close of the day's sales, each person in their employ was summoned to the office and received a special gift, ostensibly in return for the week's unusual exertions. The clerks usually had the satisfaction of an acceptable addition to their month's salary; the young ladies, some article of wearing apparel, selected, in his day, by the senior Mr. Churchill himself, and sure to be serviceable, as well as excellent in kind. Of late, the choice had devolved on Miss Choate, whose economical propensities were held in check by Mr. Lewis, who overlooked the distribution. Nine o'clock was the signal for this cheerful business to commence, and one after another was called, and reappeared with smiling or disappointed faces, as the case might be.

Margaret dreaded, yet longed for the summons, the signal for her final departure, and stood watching the inner door, with nervous starts and suddenly failing pulse, whenever she imagined the time had come. She echoed the merry wishes and glad "good-nights" of those who were going,

and thought "it is for the last time." The lights were dying out around her; the great cloth hangings began to stretch gloomily from floor to ceiling; still her name had not been called, and while she wondered and waited, and saw even the cash boys go in before her, it suddenly came into her mind that the omission was intentional, a part of the disapprobation in which she was held, and which waited only definite proof, for her dismissal. Her breath came quick and hard at the thought, and she started up, yielding to the impulse of the moment, to follow and detain the real aggressor, who had just passed by with a light mocking laugh, and accuse her face to face. But a voice seemed ringing in her ears, "Avenge not yourselves," and she turned, nerved by very hopelessness of the moment, to seal her own dismissal.

Miss Choate now occupied the office-chair, before which Margaret had been summoned to her brother's judgment, checking the list of names; there were but few remaining who had not received their Christmas gift. Margaret's was not there. She knew it when she appeared before them, and saw the start by which her entrance was greeted, quite as well as when Miss Choate

said, uneasily, looking from Mr. Churchill to her brother—

“I don’t find you here at all, Miss Grant. I don’t think *I* have made the mistake; for I know I called the ‘G’s’ regularly, and Mr. Churchill made out the list himself.”

Margaret gave him no time for reply. “I did not come for any gift. I should have waited to be sent for. I came to say that I leave my situation to-night, to be disposed of as you think best. That is all.” And she was gone before Mr. Caleb and his sister had recovered from their astonishment, or Mr. Churchill, who would have detained her, could do so. He followed her to the door, indeed, the next moment, with hasty step; but the porters were in the store busy with their nightly arrangements, and she had passed on swiftly to the dressing-room, where were voices and laughter.

Margaret did not wait for any more farewells; she reached her bonnet and shawl, and went out into the night, followed closely by Adelaide Long and her lover. They had waited and watched for her—she felt that and the mockery of their “Merry Christmas, Miss Grant,” as they hurried

by. Then all feeling was absorbed in the utter loneliness of her position, shrinking with a woman's fear from the noisy groups of revellers, unsheltered from the drenching, driving storm. "Always unsheltered, always uncared for," she thought; "it has been so all my life, from the time I can remember; always working for others, always sacrificed to others. *Must* I go on so! Oh, it is very hard! very bitter! All Thy waves and billows have gone over me!" It was a despairing but not a rebellious cry, and the "Even so, if it seemeth good in Thy sight," rose up with true if not cheerful acquiescence.

There were hasty steps behind her, and she quickened her own pace. It was later than she had ever been abroad before, and the streets were full of lawless men, bent on a night of riot and excess.

"Margaret!"

Still she hurried on, thinking her own imagination mocked her.

"Margaret! One moment! Will you not let me take care of you? It is no night for you to be out alone!"

She faltered then, with a sudden trembling

that made her heart stand still. It was not the cold, or the drenching shower; but that she should be remembered, cared for by him. She knew the earnest voice—whose arm had thrown a heavy plaid around her—as well as when she turned to find Lewis Churchill.

“You are drenched, and shivering with cold,” he said; “you must not expose yourself in this way. Trust me, Margaret, as if I were your—brother. Will you not?”

Trust him? Yes; she had always trusted him; and now she stood in beggarly need of some other human strength and comfort. A strange content stole over her, and calmed her, as she stood leaning on his arm—he bending down to shelter her, until the carriage that he had signalled from the stand approached, and then she was lifted in, and he sprang to the seat beside her. She did not make a motion of dissent, or even wonder how he knew it, when she heard him tell the driver the name of the court in which she lived, but leaned back, not even caring to have the blessed silence broken.

“So, Margaret, you have given us up tonight,” he said, as they rolled away from the

glare of the noisy thoroughfare. "I will not ask you why; I know you never act without good reason. But what if I will not let you go? What if I hold you here by me always?"—and the hand that had sought her own grasped it firmly.

She did not reproach him with wronging another by such words; she trusted him, by all she knew of his life, that he meant what he was saying, honorably and truly, though she could not comprehend it, and sat silent as before.

"Will you go now, when I tell you that I love you as if you were already my own wife? Will you be my wife, Margaret?"

"His wife!" How the words rang in upon the stupor that seemed to have fallen on her. "His wife!" She had never said that, even to herself, before; she had only thought, but never as now, how she could have loved him!

"Margaret! You will at least tell me whether I have offended you?"—and he waited until she said—

"Oh no, no!"

"I have no reason to think that you would make me such a precious Christmas gift as the right to

love and cherish you. But if you knew how hard it has been to see you braving fatigue and exposure day after day! how many ways I have planned of approaching you less rashly! how I dreaded to speak lest I should have deceived myself in thinking that you would *learn* to love me! You cannot now—you do not even know me as I am, though you have seen me daily for three years.”

“But you do not know what you ask for. You do not know *me!*”

“I? I do, Margaret, better than you think. I knew you first in your gentle, dignified womanhood, with such a face as always calmed me—even in pictures when I have found it; and then I watched you to see if I were deceived in thinking it was the impress of the inner life, of its purity, energy, and loving-heartedness, that I saw. Forgive me that I began the study coldly, when it ended in loving what I found!”

“Do you *love* me?” she said, dreamily—as if she stayed her feet on the brink of a stream she dared not essay to cross.

“Yes, love you; could any one know how you have borne your lot in life, and not love you,

my patient Margaret! How you have held to 'all things beautiful, and pure, and of good report,' in the midst of ungenial influences—what a daughter you have been—what a mother to your little sister! You must let me share the task-work now; will you not? Will you try to love me, and give me time to prove that this is no sudden, passing fancy?"

The unnatural quiet passed away with a long, grieving sigh, and, as she felt herself drawn towards him, Margaret laid her head on the heart that pleaded "for love's sake." "Oh, I am so tired of battling on alone—so happy!"—and she lay quite still for a moment, as a weary child would rest in the shelter of loving arms. Then the thoughts of Susie's helplessness, and her father's lonely, companionless life, came with their forbidding influence. And Mr. Churchill's family! she could not mar their unbroken happiness by such an unwelcome intrusion. It was a dream, bright as brief; but she must rouse herself from it, and do as she had even done before, go on her way alone, not wholly cast down, since he might have loved her.

“Why do you start away?—will you not rest here, Margaret?—do you not trust me yet?”

“But you do not know”—and an unworthy flush rose to her face, as she remembered the obscure street they were so rapidly approaching—“We are not like those you have always known; we are very poor and plain, and you must not let pity blind you to the reality, or make you blush in your own home when you think of mine.”

“I understand all you mean to say.”

“But wait till you see—that is different.”

“And if then I say, come? I humor your faithless scruples, you see. Will you come?—to my home?—*our* home?”

“We are almost there”—and Margaret leaned towards the window to escape the pleading of her own heart, suing for him with stronger pleas than any he could utter. “Look out and see! Could you hear it said that you had stooped to this?—could your family know it, and not reproach me?”

He looked out at her bidding. She was right; he had not realized that she had lived surrounded by such scenes from her childhood—the low drinking shops—the noisy brawlers upon the side-walk

—the poor, squalid houses—the shouting, and singing, and quarrelling that came from within—the miserable air of poverty and decay on every thing; yet it only made him long more earnestly to carry her away from all such wretched associations, and make her future life so bright and happy that she would come to forget that she had ever known them.

“My poor Margaret?” And he turned away to clasp her more closely still.

She could not deny herself the transient shelter, for all that she repeated over to herself, again and again, “It must not be.” How swiftly the still moments flew by! The carriage turned into the narrow court, halted, and the farewell had come.

“I must see your father in the morning. Yes, Margaret, I shall; and walk with you to church. It must be as I say, now. God bless you!” And he was gone before Mrs. Grant, startled by the unusual sound of wheels, had reached the door, and unbolted it.

“La, it’s only you, is it? I thought I heard a cab, or something. I suppose I must sit up

till midnight for everybody. No signs of your father yet.”

It was an ungracious and fretful greeting ; but the echo of that “ God bless you ” charmed away the discord, and in her own room she could try to make the last hour real. Susie’s pale, sleeping face reminded her of the unfinished task, not task but pleasure, for sleep was impossible—and as her needle flew, happy thought, strange questioning, and bright anticipations that would not be driven back, floated and mingled in her mind, marked by the smiles and blushes, and grave earnest looks that passed over the face bent downward to her work.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. GRANT had gone out early in the evening upon his daily quest, news from the Patent Office. Morning and night he made his appearance at Mr. Dunlap's counting-room, insensible to the quizzing of the clerks, and the half-suppressed impatience of their principal at his importunity. It was closed when he reached it? the heavy shutters were barred, and the door securely fastened for the night. He tried the lock, but it did not yield.

It was a greater disappointment than it would have been at any other time; all that day he had had a fancy, almost a presentiment, that the afternoon mail would bring him the wished-for intelligence. It was founded, doubtless, on Mr. Dunlap's opinion that this was the earliest moment they could reasonably expect to hear, and his own craving wishes. Be that as it may, all chance of know-

ing the truth was cut off for two days at least, for there would be no business transacted on the morrow. If there had been but one night to pass in uncertainty, Mr. Grant would have gone gloomily home again, sunk in one of his most despondent moods, the natural alternation of the excitement in which he lived. Two nights! all Christmas day; it was impossible. He turned towards the business part of the city, walking slowly with unsettled purpose; but a sudden thought quickened his pace, and altered the course he had taken.

Naturally shrinking and timid, nothing less than the restlessness of the moment could have decided him to seek Mr. Dunlap at his own house. He knew where it was, for he had often directed his numberless appeals to it—far out in the western part of the city, on one of the new squares that were already springing up magically in the region known as “beyond Broad.” He passed through thronged streets, and squares of luxurious houses, but he saw nothing of the gayety which shone out everywhere. His whole soul was wrapped up in his own quest: nor did it seem unreasonable or importunate until he had reached the house: then he paused before the high marble steps, and saw

the light pouring out of the vestibule door, through the rich lace curtains at the drawing-room windows, and heard the sound of music and merriment within. They, in their household joy, little knew how the footsteps of an old gray-haired man, prematurely old with the strivings and disappointments of years, faltered at the threshold, and paced the flagging back and forth, while the storm beat down on his unsheltered head. But this he did not feel: he was only trying to quell the impulse which had led him there, but it conquered even his shrinking, sensitive nature, and he ascended the steps at last. The back drawing-room of the prosperous merchant's house was a goodly scene that evening. It was only a family party, as befitted Christmas Eve: but children and grand-children were gathered there, and there was the glad anticipation of more welcomes when the New York train arrived. The grand distribution of gifts had already been made, and sofa, chairs, and the piano were in a chaos of toys, bonbons, and more cumbersome tokens for the elders. At the round table, under the central light, sat Mrs. Dunlap herself, a comely, dignified lady, whose brown eyes were full of quiet joyfulness as she looked around and

saw all there—not one blank had the year made in their great happiness.

But “grandmamma” was not suffered to have a quiet enjoyment: incessant demands were made upon her for admiration of work-boxes, books, toys, and ornaments, by the children, and by their proud fathers and mothers for rapturous commendations of the juveniles themselves. “Grandpapa” had forgotten his invoices and cargoes, and for this night was “a boy again,” sounding famous blasts on hunting-horns, and squeaking dolls to the hearts’ delight of their fortunate possessors.

In the midst of all this merriment, the door-bell sounded, startling all to an instant’s silence.

“It’s the boys!” cried Mrs. Dunlap; for her sons were boys to her still, for all their bearded faces.

But no, the mantel-clock checked that hope; it pointed only eight.

“Some more presents! hurrah!” shouted the children, who had already made divers journeys to the hall for the welcome packages that had presented themselves.

It was in vain to call “Come back, Joe—wait, Alice—here, Clara:”—the whole merry little troop poured out, to find, to their great disappoint-

ment, "only a little old man, who wants to see grandpapa."

"On business, he says, sir—only a moment," reported the waiter, who by this time had made a hearing for himself.

Mr. Dunlap's unusual hilarity changed into a frown. "Tell him I'm engaged; I think I may have one night in the year to give to my family unmolested.

"Did he say what it was?" asked Mrs. Dunlap, with kindly voice, as the servant hesitated a moment, not liking to convey such a discouraging message to the drenched, weary-looking man without. "Ask him what he wants; it may be some one who needs help," she added, as she saw her husband's movement of dissent; "and I could not enjoy my own happy home if we turned any one in need away to-night, and such a night."

"His name is Grant," said the waiter, reappearing, "and he said you would know."

"Bother!" and Mr. Dunlap started up with a look and tone of still greater annoyance. "That man is the plague of my life. No, I won't see him!"

"My dear, you don't know—hadn't you better see? Is it the Mr. Grant who has been so per-

severing about the patent? Oh, do see him. I always feel so sorry for him."

"He looks so tired, grandpa; sha'n't I tell him to come in?" said Joe, the namesake and pet of his grandfather, boldly.

Mr. Dunlap's heart smote him, but he did not give up his vexation, nevertheless. It was the very sympathy he felt for Mr. Grant, and his repeated disappointments, which made him resent the intrusion.

"Well, show him into the library; I'll be there in a moment. Mother, where are my letters? I did not mean to break a seal to-night; I have not even looked at a post-mark, for fear of some news that would upset me."

How magically warm and glittering those rooms looked to the lonely man as he drew near the library grate, feeling, for the first time, that he was drenched to the skin! One glass door stood ajar, and through it he saw the brilliant chandeliers, chiming faintly with all their rainbow prisms, the shining of mirrors and pictures on the wall, the warmth of damask draperies and velvet carpets, the bright faces of the children, the happy glances of their elders; and then came into his

mind, strangely enough at that moment, when he was all eagerness for his errand, thoughts of Margaret, stately and graceful as any of those beautiful women, defrauded by him of hardly-earned comforts, and Susie, his motherless darling, who had never known a child's light-hearted happiness. He did not mind Mr. Dunlap's somewhat ungracious greeting, but stood with keen expectancy shining out of those strangely lighted eyes, and speaking in every line of his worn, sallow face, while the post-marks were examined one by one.

“Ha!”—and Mr. Dunlap's face lighted up from its unsympathizing coldness, as he found, beneath some magazines and papers, a large envelope, with its well-known official seal. “I believe we have it, after all; bad news is better than none, hey?”—and he began to read.

The face of the watcher worked convulsively; the suspense seemed stifling him, and he passed his hand through his neckcloth to loosen it.

“True as—no—stop! Yes—‘as herein specified’—done at last! I congratulate you, Mr. Grant; you've carried the day!”

“Oh no, sir! not granted?”

“Yes, sir!” and Mr. Dunlap gave the docu-

ments an emphatic thump. It would have been a relief to him to say "By ——" something, but Mr. Dunlap never gave way to profane impulses, however much old habits might tempt. He got up from his desk though, and shook Mr. Grant's hand as heartily as if he had been his brother.

"Now it's come, let me give you a piece of advice. It isn't going to turn out an everlasting fortune, you know, though it's something. Part of the improvement has been anticipated. Adams is the man to carry it, and he's made me the offer of \$10,000 clear for my third, if it come to any thing. I'd advise you to make the same terms; he's a practical man, and he can make a better use of it than you or I could."

But Mr. Grant had not followed him through the proposition. Mr. Dunlap could not understand the inventor's triumph at a success not only achieved but acknowledged, or the relief from absolute want to comparative wealth; neither emotion could be fully shared but by Margaret, his own much-enduring, helpful, hopeful Margaret.

"Thank you; I must go. Oh, I thank you again for seeing me to-night. Tell them why I

ventured to call you away ;” and he waved his hand towards the parlor. “But are you sure, sir ? Oh, a mistake would kill me now !”

“Sure—sure as a gun !” said Mr. Dunlap, with more warmth than elegance ; his natural satisfaction at the result being heightened by an imaginary feeling of self-sacrifice connected with it. “You must have a glass of wine, Mr. Grant. Here’s to the patent, and I wish you a merry Christmas !”

He stopped to take it, only because he did not feel as if he could reach home without it, and not a moment longer. Mr. Dunlap closed the door upon him, and went back in smiling contrast to his forced exit.

“Well, mother, the patent’s granted. The documents happened to be there, as I should have seen if I had brought up the letters myself.”

“Really ! I must go and shake hands with him ; oh, I am delighted !” and Mrs. Dunlap’s benevolent countenance did not belie her heart.

“Oh, he’s gone !—off like a shot !—he would hardly wait to take a glass of wine, though he trembled from head to foot.” Mr. Dunlap rubbed his hands in a glow of self-satisfaction.

“Grandpa!”—it was little Joe, who stood and played with the great seals of Mr. Dunlap’s watch-chain—“ain’t you glad now that you minded grandma and me, and went to see the poor old man?”

Margaret stood up and shook out the new dress, Susie’s one Christmas present. It was quite done, even the little bit of lace tacked around the neck, and the sister’s eyes already saw her little one arrayed in it; but, as she stood brushing off the bits of clippings and thread, she heard voices, and her own name called from below. She did not distinguish her father’s; but, ever watchful for him, and suddenly remembering his unwonted absence, flew down the stairs; impelled by a nameless terror of accident or mischance. Mrs. Grant’s eyes, heavy with sleep, were distended by some startling intelligence she seemed as yet scarcely to understand, and her husband tottered towards Margaret with outstretched arms.

“Oh, Margaret! it’s mine at last—the patent”—and he burst into tears, sobbing like a child.

Margaret soothed him as she would have com-

forted Susie, while he clung to her as helplessly ; smoothing his silvery hair, whitened so rapidly of late, but asking nothing. " Poor father ! dear father ! "

" I don't care for any thing, now it has come, but you, Margaret. I've been so cruel and hard-hearted to you and Susie ; but you shall have it all back again. Oh, Margaret ! "

It was no time to tell him of her own strange repayment ; and it was long before she could win him to try and sleep ; but when he did so, heavily, for he was exhausted in mind and body, she stole back to Susie's bedside, and knelt, until the midnight chimes rang out their Christmas greeting, with a heart too full even for audible thanksgiving.

CHAPTER XX.

It was very hard for Mrs. Grant, just come into a marvellous fortune—ten thousand dollars being an exhaustless sum in her eyes—to be obliged to get up and dress her own children, by a kitchen fire, too ! However, it would only be for a very little while : their quarter would be up on New-Year's day, and it should not find her in Shippen Court, she had already determined, nor without "a girl." Having a maid of all work was the first step Mrs. Grant contemplated towards gentility.

It was impossible to sleep with such plans in prospect, and to the general good of the household, and much to Margaret's comfort, the breakfast-table was cleared at an hour hitherto unprecedented in the annals of Mrs. Grant's house-keeping. Margaret set aside the last dish, with a glance at the clock. How many times she had con-

sulted it already, it is needless to say. She watched for an opportunity to prepare her father for the morning's interview; but he was making an unusually prolonged toilet in his own room. All his lost self-respect seemed suddenly restored to him; he brushed his best suit of clothes carefully, and smoothed his well-worn hat, in honor of the day.

The night before had been bright and hopeful. Her father's good fortune removed the chief obstacle in Margaret's way, and seemed to her excited imagination a token for good in all that had befallen her. To-day new and less worthy difficulties presented themselves. Allowing that Mr. Churchill loved her sufficiently to overlook her present position, what could his family say when they came to see her in the little narrow room, so seldom used, or indeed opened, which was all she had to receive them in? She went in and unclosed the blind, looking around her with dismay. The faded, threadbare carpet, the slender flag-seated chairs, the bare table between the windows, the pair of empty glass lamps upon the mantel, were its sole furniture and adornment. All was cold, cheerless, and homely in the extreme; and while she dusted the furniture carefully, and turned the

chairs about to try and make them a little less stiff and formal, she started at every footstep on the pavement outside, lest Mr. Churchill should be early at his tryst, and surprise her in a morning-dress. It was the same that he was accustomed to see her in, however. Her hair was smoothly parted, and put up in the heavy coils that gave very little idea of its luxuriance; her collar pinned with the same exactness. Margaret could not have appeared out of her own room attired with less scrupulous neatness.

Her father was in the little working-room when she went up stairs again, and as she opened the door softly, saying, "May I come in?" he started, and set down his first rough model of the machinery he had lived to bring to perfection. He was thinking of her mother, as she appeared before him, with a look so like that the dead had worn, that she seemed to stand in her place.

"You must be very happy, father; what a merry Christmas it is!" she said, as she came and stood beside him.

He shook his head slowly. "No, not merry, it's too late for that; but not too late to make you and Susie happy. If it hadn't been for you,

I should have given up in despair long ago. You will try to be happy, won't you, Margaret?"

"I am happy, happier than you know for, father; I came to tell you."

He listened, at first with a strange, vacant expression, to what she had to say; but when he came to realize that some one beside himself knew and loved what he loved in her, and wished to take her away from him, an inexpressible pang shot through his heart; but he would not be unjust, as heretofore; no, she should not even see how it had shaken him.

She was busy with her own thoughts, too, and it helped him to pass the ordeal.

"It's no more than you deserve; it's just what you deserve; tell him I said so."

"But you will see him, father, will you not? won't you go to church with me to-day, and help me thank God for all his goodness? So much, all at once! It is so strange that I cannot be thankful! not half as thankful as I ought to be."

"Not to-day, Margaret; some other time—next Sunday, perhaps. I must have some new clothes first; I must not disgrace you."

"You must not say that again; you know I am

proud of you; prouder than ever, now." And Margaret's eyes kindled as she drew herself up at the thought.

"You are not ready for church yourself," said Mr. Grant, with unusual observation for him; but even her presence oppressed him at that moment. He wanted to be quite alone.

So Margaret went back to Susie, who, wrapped in a little chintz dressing-gown, with a blanket about her, was going to try and be very patient all the morning, and lie still on the bed, in the expectation of having on the new dress when Margaret returned, and dining down stairs on chicken, and rice-pudding with plums in it—dainties to which Susie had long been a stranger.

"But where did the chickens come from?" queried Susie, as Margaret arrayed herself in her best dress—a plain colored mousseline—one of those neutral tints which painters love for their Madonnas.

"Suppose I sent for them myself this morning, expressly to give you a treat?"

"Well, I suppose you did; nobody else would have thought about it, or has got so much money."

"Yes, indeed! there you're mistaken. Now

I'm going to tell you a grand Christmas secret, the reason father kissed you so, when he saw you this morning, only I didn't want you to know it then, because I was afraid of one of your bad headaches."

"Oh, it's all gone now; do tell me!"

"Truly? Well, then, father is going to have a great deal of money for his patent, and mother says we shall move into a better house."

"Is that all?" Susie's look of expectancy fell.

"All? You unreasonable little thing!"

"Oh, I thought you were going to say that you and I were going off to live by ourselves. You've got your collar wrong side out, Margaret."

It was quite true; and Margaret laughed at herself, as she unclasped the little oval hair brooch, worn only on high-days, and remedied her carelessness. Her holiday apparel admitted no other finery; but it was sufficient, in its neatness and simplicity, for any time and place that she was likely to encounter. She had found her bonnet of three winters past all repair; but her summer's straw, still white, and retrimmed with a simple ribbon of dark plaid, did not look out of season.

“It was nice to have the rain stop to-day,” said Susie, seeing her sister glance towards the window; “I think it’s all going to clear off, too.”

“Yes, there comes the sun now!” and a bright clear ray shone into the sombre little room. “In token of the full tide of sunshine to come,” thought Margaret, as she stooped to take a shawl from one of the deepest drawers of the old-fashioned bureau. It was a drawer in which were kept the relics of her own mother’s wardrobe. This shawl she had worn many a day—a white merino, with deep woven border, delicate and ladylike, though its fashion had passed away; and when Margaret threw it about her in natural graceful folds, Lewis Churchill had no need to be ashamed of the bride he had chosen.

Still he did not come. It was quite time that she should set out. She had loitered and delayed until the latest moment; but she did not doubt him even then. Oh, no; something had happened to detain him; she should see him after church, perhaps, and that was better; her mind would not be so distracted in the service. It was a disappointment, she was obliged to acknowledge that,

and saw for the first time how much she had depended on it, with all her denials.

“Don't try to read, for fear of the headache ; and here is your new dress to hang before you all the morning, ready to slip on the moment I get here. Good-by,” was her farewell to Susie, longing to tell her, all the time, what had really happened. But she must wait to see.

Mr. Grant came out with Margaret.

“Won't you go, father ? Your clothes look well enough, you have brushed them so nicely.” And then her eyes shone suddenly, for there he was, crossing the street to meet them. Margaret took her father's arm instinctively ; and her pride in him was never greater than when she said, “My father, Mr. Churchill.”

They walked on for a little way together ; but when they came to a broader street, Mr. Grant stood still, and said : “Mr. Churchill, Margaret has told me all about it ; I believe you mean well by her ; I hope you may be happy ; she's been a good and faithful daughter to me.”

His voice grew tremulous, and he turned away from them instantly. He could not bear yet to see them together ; the new-born jealousy rose up,

mingled with such a tender love for Margaret, in the constant recollection of what she had been to him, as in all those many years he had never felt before.

“He has given you to me, Margaret; you are mine, now,” Mr. Churchill said, quietly.

She took his proffered arm, as she had leaned on her father’s the moment before; she felt that the transfer was final.

They had not much to say in that first walk together. Margaret’s many questionings died away, now that she had met him, and he seemed too much absorbed in the grave reality of all he had assumed—the right to guide her life hereafter—for outward comment.

The crowd thronged past the iron gates as on that Sabbath morning—how little while ago! She could scarcely believe that so few days had passed since her solitary communing. How strange it seemed, still to lean upon his arm, in the presence of them all, his friends and acquaintances, who bowed in passing, and, she felt, regarded her with curious scrutiny. They must separate in a moment, though. They stood within the lobby, at the foot of the stairs, but Mr. Churchill did not

release her. Margaret had not thought, for a moment, of anything but her own obscure and humble corner; but she was not to kneel there now. She saw only the tessellated pavement, and she went down the aisle, following a stronger will than her own. She looked up to find herself surrounded by those well-known household faces, silently smiling a welcome to her; she could not be mistaken in that; making a place for her in their midst; adopting her in God's own house to be as one of themselves.

She covered her face to pray, but her heart only said, "Oh, my God, I do not deserve it!" and the thrilling prelude of the organ above them seemed like far-off heavenly music, unreal as all the rest.

It was God's own house, and she had come to worship him, not to indulge in dreams of earthly devotion. The thought stilled the tumult of her soul, and steadied her voice for the "psalm of thanksgiving," though she heard but one deep-toned response through all.

Mr. Churchill, senior, polished his spectacles far more than was usually necessary, all through

the sermon, and his wife manifested a motherly anxiety that Margaret should be comfortably seated. She was between the two sisters, and now and then caught a look from the elder, that, more than any thing else, made her feel that this welcome was from the heart and not by constraint—

“For her deep blue eyes smiled constantly, as if they had by fitness,
The secret of a happy dream she did not care to speak.”

When they came out from the joyful, solemn services of the day, the family feeling was no longer to be restrained.

Mr. Churchill rubbed his hands as if he had done a good thing, after he had shaken Margaret's in his heartiest manner. Mrs. Churchill said, “Of course, you dine with us to-day, my dear. Agnes and Lewis will walk; we want you in the carriage with us.”

It was in vain to refuse—to plead home duties. Margaret found herself taken possession of, the carriage door shut on her, and Lewis, bowing from the sidewalk, looked so happy and bright, that she knew it had all been arranged between them. Her anxiety for Susie overcame the embarrassment she would otherwise have felt painfully.

“I have a little sick sister, Mrs. Churchill, who

is watching for me now, I dare say; you are very kind, but I cannot leave her."

"Oh, it is the little girl Lewis spoke of, I know, my dear. Does she cough much? You must have young Dr. Meigs see her. He is our family physician, now that his father has given us up. Has she been very sick?—You must feel anxious about her."

"Take her to the country next summer, that will set her up; nothing like trotting about on the green grass to bring a child round again," said Mr. Churchill; and yet the horses' heads were not turned; they were carrying her away from Susie rapidly.

Margaret ventured another remonstrance: "I am sure it will not do; I do not dare to leave her all day; some other time."

"You shall go just when you say so, my dear; but we feel anxious to be better acquainted with you, don't we, father?"

"You might as well take it patiently; you see there's a league." Kate had taken no part in the little discussion before, and Margaret felt less at ease with her than any of the rest. It was, perhaps, an undefined association with her friend

Miss Wright, as well as Kate's dashing, stylish manner; differing from the simple cordiality of the others.

"You do not know how anxious I am; I hope I do not seem perverse?" Margaret said, turning to her.

"La, yes I do; don't we, mamma? It's just like my sister Anne, worrying her life out if she leaves her baby half an hour. But you really shall go if you want to, sha'n't she, papa, the very minute she says so, after she's been introduced to the house, and the furniture, and seen us with our bonnets off? You've got to put up with us all, you know, and you might as well begin."

So Margaret was forced to content herself, lest she should seem unreasonable to her new friends, who could not possibly understand Susie's position at home, and she did not care to provoke any further allusion from the saucy Kate. It was a part of the morning's unreality, the same feeling which had scarcely left her since the evening before, to find herself leaning back in this smoothly-rolling vehicle, roomy and softly cushioned, as became the fortunes of the family, and talking with Mrs. Churchill of her sister's sickness, into which

that good lady entered with true maternal interest.

Mr. Churchill, when they reached his house, handed her up the steps himself, and "mother," bustling after, took Margaret's hands in both her own and kissed her warmly. Margaret's eyes filled with tears. Were all her dreams of household love to be fully realized?

"She belongs to us, now, doesn't she, mother? I think I must have my kiss too." And Mr. Churchill helped himself accordingly. "Before Lewis himself, I dare say! Ha, ha! pretty good, to steal a march on him!" and he patted her blushing, burning face, before he released her.

"Now, make yourself quite at home, my dear, as you are, you know," said Mrs. Churchill, with a sudden reminiscence of the dinner in prospect, and the disastrous carelessness of cooks in general. "Kate will take care of you till the others come; they won't be long behind."

"Kate will be very glad to, when you all get done with her. Come straight up to my room, Margaret, for if sister gets you in hers first, there's an end of my claim. She and Lewis are such gossips, that she intends to monopolize you, I have

no doubt. That's her den; up another flight from mine. There; this is Liberty Hall!"

It was a large bright room, quite as characteristic as her sister's, and pleasant in its way, though by no means so home-like or orderly. The bed was strewn with wearing apparel, and the dressing-table in a sad confusion of ornaments, gloves, hair-pins and brushes.

"I don't allow any one to clear up but myself, after the room is once done for the day. I like my things handy. I give you free admittance. Oh, yes, you must take off your bonnet; I will see that you go the very minute you say so; but take it off, or you won't begin to feel at home."

Kate Churchill tossed her own into the centre of the bed, and untied Margaret's with the pretty despotism she practised on all the family. "There, now; seat yourself by the window and watch for them. You're after sister's own heart, I see. No—come here and try my Castle Indolence. Isn't it a famous old chair? I routed it out of the garret and had it covered myself."

Fortunately her hostess gave Margaret very little space for reply, but rattled on steadily, as she

brushed out her puffs, and made a rapid dinner toilet.

“You won't mind my going on, will you? So I'll dress all the same as if you were Josephine.”

Was the allusion intentional? Margaret caught the keen glance of Kate's fine eyes, and a certain distrust disturbed her. Kate watched her varying color with merciless scrutiny, as she finished her dressing operations.

“What splendid hair you have! Why don't you dress it so as to show what it is? Do let me try.” And, leaning over, she drew out the comb, before Margaret could prevent the mischief. “There, now, you will have to sit still, and let me do as I please; besides, I've got something to tell you.”

“Do not be long, then”—and Margaret's tone expressed very little resignation to her fate. She felt ill at ease—distrustful still of Kate, anxious about Susie, and, if the truth must be told, restless to see Lewis once more, and hear from him the assurance that she was truly welcome in his home.

“I might as well own up first as last,” said Kate, brushing away vigorously, “that I stood out

against you last night. It was only last night that Lewis told us, you know, though it seems sister knew it wasn't his fault if you did not marry him—oh, I don't know, some days ago. If you want to be jealous of any one, she's the person—those two people can't keep any thing from each other five minutes. It was always so, but a great deal more since sister was sick. I'll tell you, since you're coming into the family—though we never speak of it now—that sister was engaged herself once, but it turned out badly; the horrid man was very gay, and deceived her about it. So she broke it off, though she had a dreadful sickness, and we all thought we should lose her."

This explained to Margaret the reason of the quiet sadness, or more really thoughtfulness, that so distinguished Miss Churchill's face. And thinking of the confidence between the brother and sister, their conferences, of which she felt herself the subject, suddenly came into her mind. So it was kindness after all!

"Now you must let me do exactly as I please with your hair. As to my opposition, I'm all over it, and I intend to like you very much. Lewis will tell you that I never do any thing by halves.

But, in the first place, it was so sudden. We were all sitting round the fire, waiting for Lewis, when in he came white as a ghost, positively, as if he had been drowned instead of engaged, and Agnes started up—she knew, it appears, that he was going to try and see you in some way last evening—and she said, ‘Well!’

“‘I hope so,’ said he. And then he came and sat down between father and mother, and told them all about you, and how you had taken care of your little sister, and studied, and read, and behaved yourself generally, and that he wanted to put a stop to it all by taking charge of you and everybody else himself. Sister made her speech, too, and swore to all Lewis said, and mamma cried, and papa used his pocket-handkerchief trumpet-fashion. My dear, it was as good as a play! Now, don’t get vexed. I did; for I had set my heart on his marrying Josephine Wright, and I told him he had behaved shamefully to her. I dare say you think he couldn’t behave shamefully to any one! He and Agnes set to work to prove to me that it was all my imagination and mamma’s, because she was so anxious to get Lewis married.”

Margaret's inborn pride struggled for a moment with her better nature, to put thoughts of anger towards Kate, and distrust of Lewis, in the "vessel of her peace," but she battled with it bravely, in the silence she enjoined upon herself.

"I wouldn't hear one word though, till, just in the midst of it, I got a note from Joe, with that cologne-stand there on the bureau—the seventh cologne-stand, my dear, that came into this house last evening! Everybody pitches on them when they don't know what else to get at Christmas, as they give children Noah's Arks. Charley had three Noah's Arks this morning, with the prospect of another. There's the note now. I was so vexed that I tossed it into the table-drawer last night. Just hear!"

"But perhaps I ought not to."

"Oh dear, yes! It will set your mind at rest, too, if you ever heard the report that they were engaged; I know you have by the way you looked just now."

Kate smoothed out, and glanced over the crumpled, amber-colored sheet.

"She wrote to tell me that she was engaged herself two days ago. Let's see, Monday evening.

Three whole days ago, and without telling me; however, we shall never be so intimate again. She says it was the night Lewis rode home with her from Anne's—my own plan it was, too—and she knew, if ever he intended to propose, he would have done it then. We used to talk it over, you know. Don't look so shocked. And so, as Morton Sargeant *did*, that very night, she accepted him on the spot, and has 'had the most *beautiful* Christmas presents from all the family!' So *that* matter was settled!"

Kate forced a hair-pin into the braid she had just completed with such energy that Margaret started away from her, her mind greatly quieted, nevertheless, by the relation she had been listening to. After all, it was but natural that Kate should feel as she had done. If they had all felt so, and opposed the whole arrangement, it would still have been what she might have expected.

Margaret's pride gave way to a sudden access of humility, as she thought how few would ever have overcome conventional prejudice as Lewis had done, or would have received her so warmly as all his family appeared to do. The very aspect of this room, so large, so heavily furnished—the

polished wardrobe, reflecting her figure like a mirror—the elegant dressing-bureau—the low, graceful bedstead—the carpet, with its tiny bouquets of rose-buds—all brought home to her the great difference as to their social position.

“There, now—look at yourself, and be obliged to me. I wouldn’t have supposed it would make such a difference.” Kate caught up an opera-cloak with an edge of ermine, and threw it over Margaret’s plain attire, then wheeled her chair about directly in front of the mirror. “More like Queen Margaret than Lewis’s Saint: he was actually so poetical as to liken you to that distinguished individual, when I asked him what kind of a face you had; for I did not remember you, though sister and mamma did.”

The broad braided coronal Kate had bound around Margaret’s head had indeed changed the whole style of her face. Margaret scarcely recognized herself. But it was not the coiffure alone; the bright, hopeful expression belonged to the new phase of life she had entered upon so suddenly.

“I wonder if those people have come; it’s high time. Don’t you want to see sister’s room? Let’s go down.”

It was a relief to go anywhere, in this excited state of expectancy. It certainly seemed as if Lewis and his sister might have reached home long ago. Kate had by no means hurried in her self-appointed task as hair-dresser.

“Come in,” said Miss Churchill to the light knock which announced these two girls, so unlike, yet standing there as if accustomed for years to familiar intercourse. Even Kate respected her sister's love of quiet and seclusion by asking for admittance; but now she threw open the door with a flourish, and gave place to Margaret. “I was just coming to bring Margaret down,” said Agnes, turning to see her.

“When you had put your bonnet in its box, and folded your shawl in the original creases. Where is your Silver-hair? Oh, here she is. Do you know your sister, little one?” And there lay Susie herself, nestled among the fair large pillows on the lounge, the crimson frock standing out by contrast, and the short golden locks brushed back into close rings on her blue-veined forehead. Susie seemed much more at home, and far less astonished than Margaret; but the end of all these mysteries had come.

“It wasn’t very good of you, Margaret, not to tell me that you knew my Miss Agnes all the while.”

Agnes turned round and looked towards them with that same “slow smile.” There was no need for Margaret to question Lewis now, as she intended to the very minute she saw him alone again, how he knew where her home was, and of her home life. She had never heard Miss Churchill’s name before. How well it suited her! and how thoroughly happy she looked in the success of her little plot!

“But how did you get here, Susie?”

“*She* brought me,” said Susie, laying her head back again contentedly, and wonderfully at home. But Susie had lived in fairy land so much of her life, and been witness to so many Arabian enchantments, that she was perfectly satisfied to act in one.

‘But how? Who dressed you, Susie?’

“Ruthy. She came round just as you went, before church, and dressed me in five minutes, and told me to keep still as a mouse until Miss Agnes came for me. She said you were going to spend the day with her; so I knew it was all right, and I came; though I did not think it was

going to be such a lovely house; it's as good as the White Cat's Palace, I think."

"Good Susie! I think you and I shall be friends," said Kate, getting down on the floor beside her. "Will I do for the White-Cat Princess? I'm sister to Miss Agnes."

"Margaret looks like a princess with her hair that way, doesn't she? Did you fix it so?"

But Margaret did not care to have Susie enter on one of her eulogies.

"Was father at home when you came away?"

"Oh, yes; he told me to tell you he hoped you and I would have a pleasant time."

"She wants to go straight home again, Susie," said Kate; "shall we let her?"

"Do you, Margaret? Oh, I wouldn't!"

The deprecating tone spoke Susie's satisfaction with her present surroundings and prospects very decidedly.

"But I didn't tell you," said she, breaking forth again, "how Miss Agnes wrapped me all up in a great shawl when she came, and mother looked so astonished, and *he* held me all the way."

"There's the dinner-bell. Come, Susie"—and

Kate held out her hand. "We dine at two on Christmas day, to give the servants an afternoon."

Susie rose with alacrity. "You'll stay, won't you, Margaret?"

"I'll answer for her," said Agnes, as the two came close behind.

"I was so glad it was the good gentleman who took me to you in the store. I didn't tell you, did I?" said Susie, dropping Kate's hand to squeeze Margaret's, by way of venting her delight, as they went out into the hall. "He said he was going to be my brother too."

"Hush, Susie!"

"He did; didn't he, Miss Agnes? and then I was to call him Lewis. Do you call him Lewis? I should be afraid to."

"So is she," said some one close behind them, who took Margaret's hand and drew her arm through his. "Pass on, Kate. Mother and father have gone down, Agnes. Anne has just come, But she is going to try very hard, Susie."

It was a grand family dinner, as our readers who have already known something of its purveying, can well imagine. The sirloin before Mr. Churchill, the turkey which Mrs. Churchill re-

signed to Mr. Parker's carving, the chicken-pie helped by Agnes, with the many side-dishes and sauces which went to make up the feast. Susie's eyes opened wider and wider every moment, and she ceased to ask, "May I, sister?" before tasting the many dainties with which Mrs. Churchill continually filled her plate; and who met all Margaret's "Please nots" with a "Can't possibly hurt her, my dear; just what she needs, building up. Young Dr. Meigs would tell you so." Charlie Parker, seated between her and his mother, and very busy with his potato and turkey, was for once thrown quite in the shade.

The dessert was equally bountiful, though Margaret did positively prohibit a huge slice of the famous plum pudding to the object of Mrs. Churchill's hospitable cares. Not that she herself had been neglected; there were so many to see to, that if Susie had not been there to distract her thoughts from her novel position, she would have suffered from painful embarrassment. Perhaps Agnes had thought of this when laying her plans with Lewis. She knew, at least, that it was the only thing which would keep Margaret with them all day. But the dinner, with the fresh

introductions to Mr. and Mrs. Parker, the close neighborhood of Lewis, and Mr. Churchill's uncomfortable allusions, was a trying ordeal. Margaret was only too thankful to find herself quite alone with Lewis in the drawing-room, after it had all ended, the family disappearing in various directions, and Susie with them.

Yet it was the first moment that she acknowledged fairly to herself their relation to each other, and she stood by the mantel confused and shrinking a little, when Lewis came towards her, and folded her closely in his arms.

"My own Margaret—my *pearl*—all my own, soon. You must not make me wait long for my home."

She felt his kiss upon her brow, as she leaned against his heart, and listened to its strong throbbing as she had done the night before—a fond, loving kiss, but gentle as a woman's, with its lingering pressure.

"You have not had my Christmas gift yet," he said, releasing her at length. "Will you take it, Margaret?" He slipped a golden circlet, with one large pure pearl in the centre, on the hand he

still held, and she knew all that he implied by the emblem.

The afternoon faded in the twilight; the fire shone out with a deeper glow into the dusky shadows of the room; it had passed so swiftly. No wonder, when there was so much to be said. Margaret moved to speak of her inner life as she had never done before to any human being, telling something even of the great struggle through which she had passed, not to love him. And he in turn—or rather it was this that unlocked her heart—traced the gradual interest he had felt in her from the first moment they had met; how the injustice of the suspicion which had fallen on her first revealed to him that it had deepened into love; and Margaret rejoiced in the trial then, as a blessing in disguise, and thanked God for the strength that had kept her true to herself and her creed, when he said that he had long known the real offender, and still hesitated what course to pursue towards her.

The selfishness of lovers is proverbial, and it required immense self-denial to come out of this mood and go up with Agnes, who came to remind them that they were “still in the body,” to the

sitting-room attached to Mrs. Churchill's chamber. Mrs. Churchill made room for her on the comfortable old-fashioned sofa, and expatiated on Charlie's teeth and accomplishments, while Susie and the young gentleman, on the floor at their feet, apparently the best of friends, made interminable processions of the animals from his numerous arks.

Mr. Parker and his respected father-in-law meantime were discussing the prospects of business in the spring, and Mrs. Parker sat in "sister Agnes' room," hearing the whole story of the engagement from her.

When lights disturbed these various *tête-à-têtes*, tea was brought up socially, the handsome silver equipage shining on the round table, at which Mrs. Churchill presided, while Kate made herself generally useful as waitress, John having his share of the holiday abroad; after which they adjourned to the drawing-room, Mrs. Parker excusing herself to see Charlie in bed, but not before they had gathered around the hearth and sung the dear old evening hymn, a time-honored custom, brought down from Mrs. Churchill's own home. All joined in the hymn; but Susie's voice

rose clear and full above the rest, so that even Agnes involuntarily paused to listen to its strange sweetness, and wonder at the child, sitting up erect, with reverently folded hands, as she sang---

“Glory to thee, my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light.”

The united acknowledgment of dependence and thanksgiving touched Margaret as nothing else had done, and drew her towards them, for were they not all of the same “household of faith?”

The Christmas day was over, and Margaret returned to her own lowly home; but she would not be there long, for

“On her finger was a ring
She could still see glittering,
Though the night hid every thing.”

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. GRANT'S primary ambition was accomplished, though it still soared to "Alps on Alps" above the neat and comfortable house in Lombard Street, within sound of the chimes from the dear old parish church, almost beneath its shadow.

Mr. Dunlap had been very kind, and interested himself to persuade Mr. Adams to advance all that was necessary on the share of the patent Mr. Grant had retained: and it was finally arranged between them that the entire right should be yielded to Mr. Adams, a yearly dividend of its proceeds to be paid to the fortunate inventor. It promised to be a fair success, without involving Mr. Grant in any further responsibility.

Mrs. Dunlap's original interest was heightened when she came to know of the little romance in progress; and she, with her daughters, had called immediately; so that Margaret felt she should

have some friends of her own among the circle she was so soon to enter. Her engagement was of course a nine days' wonder to the town, even entire strangers to both parties making it the topic of conversation, with marginal notes and comments. The little fortune which had fallen to Mr. Grant, and which was doubled and trebled as it passed from one to another, served to explain matters, and to satisfy the wise researches of public opinion.

"Of course," said Mrs. Bond, "that alters the case: and I suppose his friends will have to overlook her having been in the store: but la, I shall always think, when I meet her, if she *is* in the Churchill carriage, how many times she's waited on me behind the counter! Why, she sold me this very brocade!"

"I pity his poor sisters, though," remarked Mrs. Thompson. "It must be a great blow to them, especially Kate. But it's just as well to have her airs taken down a little. She's the proudest piece I ever did see. How *did* they take it, Mrs. Bond?"

"Oh, hard enough, at first! There was a tremendous storm, I'm told. Mr. Churchill said

she should never step her foot into the house ; and Kate cried with rage : but he brought them all round, after a while."

"But they seem very fond of her now," urged Mrs. White, who, being very romantic in disposition, was dying to visit Margaret, and quite ready for an intense friendship. "Our pew is next to theirs ; and she sat with them the very day the engagement came out. I don't believe they were so *very* much opposed to it as the people say."

"La, yes they were, my dear ! I had it from the very best authority." Mrs. Bond did not think it worth while to name this authority. It was her chambermaid, who was very intimate with the domestics of the Churchill family. "Of course, now that the thing is done, they have to make the best of it before people."

It is thus, dear reader, that your affairs and mine are discussed by the little circle that make our public ; and this is the maximum of truth in the various bits of intelligence circulating, at times, with regard to what we fondly consider family secrets, usually to be traced to some such reliable and trustworthy source. However, let us go on,

as did the Churchills, in "the integrity of our way;" and none of these things shall move us.

They could not trouble Margaret's peace. It was more than peace, a radiant joy, that pervaded her whole life. If there ever is a time when one may give themselves up to the illusion of perfect human happiness, it is when the certainty of mutual affection has its daily signs and tokens in the watchful love that seems to live only for the one object, of surrounding us with all that can minister to our comfort and happiness when we women reign as absolute queens, and are not asked or expected to yield our wills and wishes to a divided sovereignty—the fleeting, dreaming, magic days of courtship—a period filled with all that the almost disused name implies.

To Margaret, who had never from her childhood known a time of watchful care and shielding, but had ever been steadily the guardian of the well-being and happiness of others, this devotion was especially grateful. From the first moment that the warm folds of the plaid had been thrown around her, that dreary, stormy evening, she had rested in being cared for, as one who has buffeted long with angry waves, enjoys doubly

the stillness and security of some unlooked-for haven, suddenly opening its clear, unruffled tide and sheltered shores. It was happiness enough—and so great that it was sometimes shadowed by the fear of change—to sit in the quiet of her own room, and think over all these things, as her needle flew, in the preparation of the ample wardrobe her father had charged her to provide. The dread might have grown into morbid presentiment and apprehension, had it not been for the added trust she had gained in the wisdom and goodness of the Providence that had so far guided her life, and the strong faith, stronger than ever, that, when reverses came, she should still be helped to rely on infinite wisdom, and look, beyond all human loss or trial, to the life that is to come. Absorbed in such a reverie, her eyes dim with grateful tears, Margaret sat, one morning, quite alone. She had persuaded Mrs. Grant, whose disposition improved with her fortunes, to send the boys to school regularly; and Susie was gone to her morning lesson with her dear Miss Agnes, a happy hour to the little girl and her self-appointed teacher.

From the brightness of the present and future, Margaret's thoughts had strayed back to the past

winter, and rested on Adelaide Long's still unaccountable enmity towards her. She had scarcely thought of her, of late, in the midst of her absorbing occupations; and, as she said to herself, "Poor girl! I wonder what Lewis has decided. I wish I could see her, and tell her how she has wronged herself," Mrs. Grant's maid of all work, a tidy, decent girl, came up to announce a visitor.

"Do you know the lady, Joan?"

"No, ma'am; and she had a veil over her face; and she said she wanted to see you very particular. She tould me to ask you if she can come up to your room. She wants to see you all alone. Oh, ma'am, here she is now!" said the girl, with a start, as a light step came close behind her.

Margaret herself started, for it was Adelaide Long, who had followed the girl, and stood before her.

"You will let me come right in, won't you, Margaret? Do; I must see you all alone. I would not meet any one for the world." The tone and manner were so changed, so imploring, and the face, now that she drew aside her veil, looked

so thin and haggard, that Margaret could scarcely believe it was Adelaide after all; and when the door was closed, she sank on the nearest chair, and began sobbing hysterically. "Oh, Margaret, don't tell him—Mr. Churchill! Ask him not to expose me! Oh, it would kill me! You can do any thing with him, I know: ask him not to expose it!"

"What is it, Adelaide?" said Margaret, soothingly. She knew it could be but one thing, yet greatly wondered that she should be appealed to as knowing the guilt already.

"I know you don't keep any thing from each other, and I've just found out it was you who was waiting at the dressmaker's, that night. Oh, Margaret, I know I've been spiteful and wicked towards you, but don't tell, or, if you have, beg him to let me go! won't you, Margaret? I felt so guilty that night, and I've often worried about it, and wondered who it was sitting there so still. Mrs. Down said it was you; I asked her last night, when I went to pay my bill. You've got every thing in the world to make you happy; if you only knew how miserable I was and have been ever since it happened, you would promise me."

“Mr. Churchill knows all about it, Adelaide.”

“And you will make him have the law upon me. You hate me for all I did; why don't you say so?”

“Oh, no, Adelaide, I hate no one.”

“But you must—you can't help it; I should, if I were in your place. I've tried every way to injure you and hurt your feelings—I know I have; but I was jealous of you, Margaret, and if you've ever felt that, you will know what made me do so. It was Albert Wood. I saw he began to talk to you, and talk about you, and I wanted to get you out of the store out of his way; so I hid the robe first, and put the box under your counter. I did, Margaret, but I did not dream of stealing it then.”

“Oh, how could you!”—and Margaret felt grieved to the heart that any one could deliberately plan and execute such a wrong towards another, apart from the injury to herself. “Don't wring your hands so, Adelaide; try to talk quietly; I have never injured you in any way.”

“Oh, I know you never did! That was what made me hate you the more after I had done it; don't pay me back now. Oh, if you knew all!”

“Tell me all, then ; you can trust me, Addy. I did not even tell Mr. Churchill.”

“Did not? truly, Margaret?” And the storm of tears was stayed with wonder at such undreamed-of forbearance. “Not even when they thought you took it?”

“No, not even after I knew you had the robe and had worn it. Will you not tell me now? But you must not think that I did not want to or mean to, at first ; it was a very hard struggle, and if I had been left to myself, I should have done it.”

“I don’t know why you didn’t, but I will tell you ; I know you will not let Mr. Churchill bring me out. Say you won’t ; I’ll get down on my knees to you—I’ll do any thing !” pleaded Adelaide.

Margaret looked at her sorrowfully ; she could not bear to witness such humiliation.

“I can’t promise for Mr. Churchill, but I know he does not wish to injure you, any more than I do. He will do just what he thinks best and right ; I could not influence him otherwise, if I wished to.”

“But, Margaret, suppose that when he was going to marry you, only he had not said so, but

looked and acted it, and waited on you, you should find that he was thinking about somebody else, and hesitating which to have? That was the way of it, and I knew Albert didn't love you, only everybody in the store thought you must have saved a great deal of money, because you lived at home and spent so little on yourself; and I know that if I had any money, he would not have hesitated a minute."

"He did not love you, then," said Margaret, indignantly. "You will be a great deal better off without him. If he had loved you truly, he never would have thought of any one else."

"I didn't care then, so I had him away from every one else. I loved him, Margaret; I love him now. Yes, nothing he does or can do will alter it; but I know what you mean. Never mind, I would have married him, if I had felt it all then. I have been married two months, Margaret." The bitterness, the fierceness, that passed over that changed face, told a more pitiful story than her words. She was already reaping the wages of wrong-doing; her blind self-will and vanity had bound her, for life, to a selfish, heartless man. Two months only, and she was already a neglected,

suffering wife. "It must come out, sooner or later," she said, more sullenly, when she found that, in her vehemence, she had betrayed her secret; "the sooner the better; I am tired of it—tired of every thing! I wish I was dead! I do! dead!"

"You must not talk so; you do not mean it. You are angry at something, just now. I hope you will be happy." But as Margaret uttered the wish—and it was said sincerely—she felt that there was very little chance for its fulfilment.

"You know it all, now—just what made me hate you so, when he tormented me by talking about you; and afterwards, I thought the dress would be so becoming. I did not mean really to take it at first, only to make them think you had; and I was bent on having him. I only wore it to make him fond of me. He knew I was extravagant, and he did not think of any thing wrong; that was what kept him back, because I had nothing; I always spent every dollar on my dress. Oh, Margaret, if I had only known better! If I had only had some one to tell me, when I was younger to keep me back! But I never had any thing else to do with what I earned."

The care for others had kept Margaret from this temptation, at least ; she had never recognized the blessing it had been to her, in all its fulness before. She longed to say something that could help and comfort Adelaide, she seemed so thoroughly humbled and broken in spirit. To do right was all that Lewis desired ; surely, she could promise for him not to "break a bruised reed."

"I know Mr. Churchill only wishes your real good, Addy. He did not think it was right or just to you and to the others to let it go without any notice, and he has waited to see whether you were in fault, again. He will understand it now, and forgive you, if you will only try to do differently in all things. You will promise me to"—

"I will do any thing, Margaret, I said I would ; only it would kill me, don't you see, if *he*—Albert—should find it out. He would leave me in a minute ; I think he means to, sometimes, now. I did not mean to say that, but you don't know, you don't know !"—and she wrung her hands again passionately.

If Margaret had wished to see her enemy suffering double for all she had undergone, she could have had her revenge ; but she had tried to think

gently and pityingly always; she had prayed, many a day, from an earnest soul—"Forgive our enemies, persecutors and slanderers, and *turn their hearts.*" This was her answer. Who could tell but that, from deeps so broken up, true penitence might spring? She hoped so, she prayed so, silently, as she tried to soothe the miserable girl.

"You are an angel, Margaret!" said Adelaide, suddenly, lifting her face from her hands, and pushing back the disordered hair from her hot, swollen eyes. "How can you say such things to me, when you know I tried my best to injure you? What makes you forgive me, and promise to help me?" And, as she asked the question, a dim sense of the reality of the faith which could so bend the natural human impulse of retaliation dawned on the shame and wretchedness of the hour.

It was a painful scene, from first to last; and after she was gone, Margaret felt as if a great weight had been suddenly laid upon her, with every recollection of that wild, haggard face. She bore it where all her own griefs were laid; for she remembered the charge, "Love your enemies;" and yet again: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE wedding-day had come. "At last!" said Lewis Churchill. "So soon!" thought Margaret, as she tried to regain the calm happiness with which she had looked forward to it from the short winter days. It was difficult to do this in the unusual bustle of the household, and especially of her own room, where Kate Churchill reigned supreme. They were to walk to church, for it was but a stone's throw; and it suited the simplicity of the bride's fortunes better than the pomp and circumstance which Mrs. Churchill tried to prove to her were quite indispensable. Agnes and Lewis were both on Margaret's side; and their mother was forced to content herself with the arrangement of the no longer vacant house next to Anne's in Ashburton Place. Here she toiled early and late, with "father" for a busy and efficient aid, in the midst of upholsterers and

paper-hangers, until she had the satisfaction of shutting the hall-door on the whole of the delaying, troublesome troop, and turning the key on a finished work.

“You will at least take off your bonnet in the vestry,” said Kate. “Do, Margaret. I shall not feel as if I am a bridesmaid at all, especially as I have jilted Josephine in your service. I wonder which she thinks most of, this morning, her husband that is to be, or her wedding-dress? Lepage is to do her hair.”

“You are my first and last hair-dresser, you know, Kate.”

“Then let me do as I please. The bonnet comes off—and here go these white rose-buds Ruth has brought, with all their foliage—it’s just enough—and some of this trailing white vine, whatever it is—as you won’t have a wreath, and veil, and things.”

Margaret was content to submit to her authoritative dressing-maid. She was thinking neither of her wedding-dress, nor yet of Lewis, but of Susie, her child, her nursling—of her gray-haired father who walked the rooms below with restless, unquiet tread—and of her dead mother’s charge.

Susie wondered at the long yearning looks which followed her about the room. There was nothing that she could see to grieve about; they were not going to be separated; she had already been taken into Mrs. Churchill's confidence, and shown that dear little room Lewis had given especial charge to be fitted up for her. Her Utopia had descended from the clouds; and she was to dwell in it securely, Margaret and herself really living together—not quite alone; but then she did not mind "brother Lewis," as she began to call him. He was an improvement decidedly on her original scheme.

A new life had lighted up Susie's large loving eyes, and tinged her cheek with a faint rose flush, the whole face rounding and brightening into something of the grace of childhood. Short, close curls, catching the sunlight, made up the picture; and Susie may be pardoned a little vanity in her first real white dress and blue ribbons, for she was to be second bridesmaid, and already felt quite as old as "Miss Kate," who was to officiate as principal attendant, and had drilled her thoroughly in the morning's duties.

The same feeling of unreality which made her

as one walking in a dream, that Christmas Day, haunted Margaret, as she once more entered the old church, and passed down the broad aisle towards the chancel. A glorious Easter sun had flushed the great willows and the churchyard with vivid green; and soft shadows came and went among the bridal party as they gathered about the rail. They were not alone. Friends and acquaintances stood up in the ample pews; the old companions of Margaret's daily life, half-pleased half-envious, at the prosperity which had come to her, leaned forward to catch a glimpse of her face in passing; and strangers, attracted only by the rumor of a church-wedding, had turned aside with vague curiosity and admiration of the queenly simplicity and elegance of the bride. The rich light from the chancel window rested on her bowed head as she knelt and strove to quell the tumult of glad and painful thought; for though Lewis was beside her, she heard still her father's tremulous, parting blessing, and knew how much of the brightness of his life he had cheerfully resigned. The heavy braided coronal, the few white flowers, the full-flowing folds of the dove-colored silk that swept around her to the

marble pavement was all her "worldly arraying;" but even Mrs. Churchill, looking on through her smiles and tears, was fully satisfied, and wondered she had never thought Margaret beautiful before.

"And so endeth the wooing," with the few solemn words involving a lifetime happiness and often the destinies of the hereafter, with the blessing of their friend and pastor, who knew all, and rejoiced with them—the kisses and congratulations of those near at hand, not forgetting Mrs. Grant, who in a toilet of Margaret's choosing, sustained herself wonderfully, and controlled the boys by manifold maternal gestures, better understood than described—Ruth's proud, motherly kiss, for Ruth felt herself to be the chief original cause of this fortunate climax, and certainly was confided in and "made much" of by them all, as if she had been—with the close pressure of the arm on which she leaned, and the thrilling whisper, "My wife," as they turned from the little crowd—"Margaret" was known henceforth, as Mrs. Churchill.

As for Mrs. Churchill, senior, her triumph was yet to come; she was in her element, in executing the manœuvre by which Agnes, "father,"

and herself were detached from the party waiting the signing and sealing in the vestry, leaving Kate and Susie to follow in the carriage with Lewis and his wife. It was her kind, motherly face that watched for them from the parlor window in Ashburton Place, and was first to welcome Margaret home. Yes, she had her home at last; its bright, cheerful rooms looked a welcome, as she went from one to another, Lewis, too, seeing them for the first time, for he had left all to his mother and sisters. Mrs. Churchill bustled on before them, throwing open doors, displaying closets, glorying especially in the linen-press, filled to overflowing; while Susie followed on behind, exclaiming, admiring, rejoicing in all she saw, especially the fine piano in the parlor, which she was to be allowed to practise the lessons from Agnes upon, appealing to Margaret, and Lewis, and Kate, by turns, to say if "her room, though, was not a great, great deal the prettiest."

There certainly seemed nothing to be desired—taste, experience, and liberal expenditure had combined in the arrangement; and in Margaret's own room, with its carved furniture and graceful draperies, stood a round table, covered with her

bridal gifts. She had not thought of these. Lewis had bought her the pearl brooch clasping the lace about her neck, and she valued it as his gift. But here were ornaments more than she should ever wear—silver, from Mrs. Dunlop's napkin-rings, and Anne Parker's dozen forks, to the whole tea equipage, which Mr. Churchill had hurried to order at the earliest moment after the wedding-day was fixed—a wonderful toilet-cushion, of lace, and muslin, and white ribbons, which Susie had manufactured, under the superintendence of Miss Agnes, also greatly aided by her as we are obliged to confess—and a Bible, in large clear type and plain binding, her own father's hand had inscribed, "To my dear daughter Margaret."

We will not return again, with the crowd of kinsfolk and acquaintance who thronged the parlors that evening, to offer good wishes and congratulations. We have seen Margaret's home in its best and loveliest light, and we dread no future evil or change to come on those that dwell therein; for they trusted in One who hath said, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

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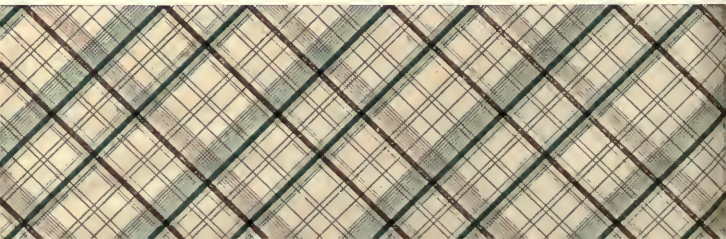


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